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OUT OF DOORS

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BY  
HERMAN WHITAKER

AUTHOR OF  
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TO ELSIE, MY DEAR DAUGHTER,  
AND LITTLE MICHAELA



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# CROSS TRAILS

## CHAPTER I

WITH her pen poised hesitantly above the account-book that served this roughest of frontier hotels for a register, the young woman stood for a few seconds before she wrote down her name. Apparently she was debating the form of the prefix, for when the pen finally dipped to the paper it began on a capital "M". But there it stopped. When, after a second hesitancy, she was forced to some conclusion by her uneasy consciousness of the landlord's scrutiny, and the open admiration of a mixed crowd of settlers and half-breeds at the other end of the room, the name stood:

"Gabrielle Ferrier, Montreal."

Left thus without a hint of his guest's condition, Joe Lacrosse exercised the gallantry which goes with even the thinnest strain of French blood. While ushering her to a bedroom—a corner of a long attic, partitioned off with cotton sheets from the general sleeping-quarters of the

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male boarders—he ventured to give her the virgin title.

“It ees all right, mees,” he combated her mis-giving concerning the “bedroom.” “Julie—she ees my wife—sleeps in the next bed. *Oui*, it ees all right, for Julie she ees ver’ strong on the propaire.”

The horror that distended the girl’s gray eyes under their black lashes—they were big enough without it—was here qualified by a touch of amusement, for she had caught a glimpse of Julie, a large, slouchy, almost full-blooded squaw, through the open door of the kitchen. But enough remained to make her jump at a chance of escape. Joe, however, shook his black shock head when she inquired if the mail-sled from Lake Winnepegosis would be in to-day.

“The Winnipegoos mail? *Oui*, it comes here—but in the wintaire not so mooch.” He could easily have put it stronger than that, but with the instinct of a born innkeeper he left the breaking of unwelcome news to others. “You can find out at the post-office, mees. It ees in the Hudson Bay store, one block up the street.”

They had ascended by means of a wide-runged ladder that was nailed on one side to the logs of the wall, and which brought up midway of the long room that served the hotel for parlor, dining-room, and office. Descending, she came again under the fire of the loungers’ eyes. In this, the first year the Canadian Pacific Railway

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had crossed the Manitoba plains, white women were still rarely seen in Portage la Prairie. In summer the passage of a settler's wife along its one street invariably produced a wake of following glances, and Gabrielle Ferrier was by no means one of that angular, labor-worn type.

The feet that felt cautiously for the rungs of the ladder were small and delicately shod. Above them slender ankles and limbs rounded into a well-molded figure and fine, flat shoulders. At twenty-three, with a height of five feet seven, her weight gravitated about one hundred and thirty-seven—rather to her alarm. The annoyance which a few extra ounces caused her was, however, quite unnecessary. One glance at the nervous nostril, trembling sensitiveness of her mouth, told that the bugbear of fat need never affright her. Without the creamy smoothness of her skin, plentiful dark hair, she would have been pretty, for the big gray eyes under black lashes would have satisfied many a woman. With them—well, Red Dominique, the freighter; Roberts, the “remittance man”; McGregor, the Scotch-Canadian trader, and the half-dozen settlers that completed the tale of Joe's guests were not to be blamed for their glances.

They were not offensive. Did a glance cross hers, it instantly dropped. Yet, though they were merely the product of the healthy curiosity natural in men long deprived of feminine companionship, expressing awe and respect that



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would have excited the laughter of a blasé city man, they made her supremely uncomfortable. Descending, she required both hands to steady her against the wall. But the instant she reached the bottom she instinctively loosened and held out her fur cloak with her elbows so that it hid all but her shoe-tips while she crossed the room.

Stepping out into the street, she vented her relief in a sigh that was quite premature, for in the looks of the three lumberjacks who had just stepped on the porch was no hint of the consideration displayed inside. Huge hulks of men, their natural roughness was accentuated by their dress, the moose-skin coats, moccasins, thick arctic socks pulled on over heavy blue overalls, which added to their bulk and gave them the uncouth look and rolling gait of so many bears. While the faces of two displayed merely the coarse animalism of the type, in the third this was adulterated by an expression of vicious cunning and fired by a certain ferocity that glowed in his curiously red, lidless eyes. In passing they stared in her face, then turned and looked after. Replying to the third man's comment, the other two burst out with hoarse guffaws that caused her to tingle with anger and shame.

"Brutes!" It issued with none the less of force because uttered beneath her breath. Hurrying on, she added that which hinted at pre-

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vious unpleasant experiences: "But then—they are *men!*"

The vigorous utterance also indicated reserves of strength beneath her soft exterior, the will and purpose that presently caused the postmaster, a gray old factor of the Hudson Bay Company, to raise his shaggy brows. "The mail, miss"—he was guided by the cool innocence of her gray eyes—"is not due for another week."

"A week?" She almost screamed it.

"Yes, miss." He nodded. "Ye'll see it only comes down every two weeks, and 'twas here last Tuesday. But if you'll be the young leddy that was expected by Mr. Byron, he left word for you to be made comfortable in the hotel at his chairges."

Alone? For a week? With all those rough men? The unspeakable sleeping-arrangements, with the proprieties guarded and conserved by Julie and Joe in the next bed? Coming on top of her anger, disappointment deprived her temporarily of speech. Walking to the window at the end of the rough counter, she peered through the one pane that had been cleared of frost and ice.

There was little of cheer in the prospect. Where, two years ago, a Hudson Bay post had raised its blockhouses and stockades from infinite wastes of snow, a shack town now rambled over the nearer view, wiping out the last jot of the romantic or picturesque. The stations and

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grain-sheds, stores with false fronts, intermittent boardwalks, presented an appearance hopelessly squalid, and even the great whiteness beyond was marred and despoiled by the serrated line of telegraph-poles.

A week? Though her plight was due, as she recognized, to her own departure from Nellie Byron's directions, the fact did not alter the situation. Of course, if Nell had informed her that the mail ran only every two weeks instead of directing her to meet it on a certain date she, Gabrielle, would never have stayed over a week with a friend in Winnipeg. But then—Nell hadn't!

Looking out over the frozen prospect, she wondered at herself for accepting the invitation in the first place. It suffered by contrasts with the gray spires, quaint old streets of Montreal, the warmth and comfort of her own home. At Lake Winnipegosis, where Nell was wintering with her husband, a commissioner of the Hudson Bay Company, it would, of course, be different. There the old life of the posts still ran as it did a half-century before the *Mayflower* discharged her first load of Pilgrim Fathers upon Plymouth Rock. And she longed to see Nell, her school-chum! But this—

At this point her reflections were given a twist by a man who had just emerged from a store and was now making his way through the snow to the station. Though she could see only

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his back, his carriage appeared familiar. But had she been well enough acquainted with northern winter styles to subtract two suits of heavy woolens and several shirts from his bulk, the differences in the appearance and gait of a man in conventional clothes and stiff shoes to the freedom and easy stealth with which he goes in moccasins and moose-skins would have more than destroyed the resemblance.

But long after she had dismissed the illusive likeness, the person whom it had recalled remained in her mind. A trifle of self-consciousness tinctured her thought: "Of course there's no reason why he shouldn't be here; his father has lumbering interests somewhere in this part of the world." She had known all along that said person's appearance was more than a possibility. Self-consciousness became self-deception when she added: "If it were he—I'd take the afternoon train back to Winnipeg," for deep down in her heart she knew that she wouldn't. Fight him she might with every weapon that scorn and dislike can place in the hands of a spirited woman. But run—never!

"Why not go back to Winnipeg, anyway?" The man's disappearance timed the thought which she answered the next second herself. "Oh no! It would look silly, and, lovely as she is, Elisabeth saw enough of me last week." With a renewal of the chagrin induced by the stares and

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rude laughter of the lumberjacks she quickly added, "But I can not, *will* not stay here."

On the heels of this resolution came the exhibition of purpose and determination that caused the Scotch factor's spectacles to fall from his nose.

"Can ye hire a horse and rig?" he repeated after her. "Ye'll be needin' a man to drive ye, then."

She did *not*. To escape man, the miserable starer, was the very crux of her purpose, and she voiced her feeling with no uncertain sound. "No; I shall drive myself."

"But my dear young leddy"—his shaggy brows flew up, dislodging the specs that were stuck over his brow—"my *dear* young leddy, to Winnipegoos is full ninety miles!"

"I'm used to horses, and have driven farther." She answered quite curtly. "There are stopping-houses, I suppose?"

"Yes, there's Norway's, twenty-five mile out, where ye'll be comfortable, for if Norway's three daughters have a big lick of Cree blood ye'll travel far to find nicer spoken girls. From there it's a long skip of forty miles to McDonald's. But the tote teamsters to the lumber-camp have built two cabins in between, so if ye did run into a storm there'd be no lack of fire or grub. The next day, of course, ye'll jump into Winnipegoos. An' the trail's good—beaten hard as a pike-road for fifty miles by the tote teams. Nevertheless,



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on the chance of a blizzard, I'd be advising ye to tak' a man."

"Now about a rig?" She totally ignored the suggestion.

If she were *not* to be dissuaded there was nothing in his canny philosophy to prevent him from coining her obstinacy into pence. "Ye'll find no fancy cutters here. But if an Indian jumper and a shaganáppy, the toughest beast on earth, will suit ye, they're mine to hire. Mr. Byron can send them down again with the mail."

"Very well." In her eagerness to get away she snapped him up. "Have it hitched at once, and"—a vivid and distasteful memory of the gauntlet she had run was responsible for the addition—"send some one to the hotel for my suitcases. My trunk can wait for the mail."

When it appeared at the store door half an hour later the outfit did not "look" the twenty dollars demanded for its hire, and, as a matter of fact, it could have been purchased outright for little more. But if the sled was merely a light "bob" built of raw birch and bound together with horsehide thongs in lieu of nails, it was still fitter for a long, cold trail than a heavy Eastern "cutter." At a hundred yards the pony's china eyes proclaimed its Indian parentage, but of horses Gabrielle knew enough to divine the staying qualities that were bound up in its ragged buckskin hide.

In her eagerness to remove herself beyond the

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sphere of masculine observation she would in any case have accepted a sheep or a dog, and she gave up the twenty with an ease that filled the Scotchman with disgust at himself for not demanding more. That being impossible, and the Moloch of business appeased, he indulged in a natural kindly feeling. After compelling her to accept the loan of his own fur coat he tucked rugs and buffalo robes about her till she resembled nothing so much as a pack of furs, and there was nothing to be seen but her face.

Thus accoutered, she drove out on the north trail to the everlasting wonder of the watching town, and it was still buzzing over her departure when, after he had finished checking off a carload of freight, the man whom she had watched returned to the hotel.

"By Gar, Boss, you mees it." Red Dominique, the freighter, hailed him while he still stood stamping the snow out of his moccasins in the doorway. "Now it ees too late. She ees gone."

"Gone? Who? Where?"

"The gel. By Gar, prettier she ees as the leetle deer. If I could but find one like her -I would quickly build the cabin by the lak', eh?"

"Pretty? You bet she's pretty," the "remittance man" coincided. "She's going out to Byron's at Winnipectoos. She wouldn't wait for the mail nor have any one drive her; just went off on her own blooming hook. Her name? I didn't look. It's over there, though, in the book."

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Crossing the room, the man opened the register, then stood, stone-still, staring down at the signature. Several seconds elapsed before he muttered under his breath, "Well, *I am* damned!" Half a minute later the thought formed in his mind: "Scrupulous as ever, but"—he smiled bitterly, scrutinizing the incomplete "M"—"she stuck on that.

"Dominique!" He looked sharply up. "Get your team over to the station."

"But you say we don't go out till morning?" the freighter objected.

"Yes, I know, but a consignment of beef came in on this train, and they are shy of meat at the camp. Besides"—he nodded at the three lumberjacks who were sitting in the circle of loafers around the box stove—"these fellows want to get out."

"Fine excuse." The remittance man laughed. "Going to chase her up, heigh?"

"Well—hardly." He covered a flash of irritation with a laugh. "You said she was going out to Norway's? We stop at the first cabin, fifteen miles out."

## CHAPTER II

OUT on the trail Gabrielle was getting along very nicely—in miles, at least.

At first sight and until usage dulls the impression, a winter prairie is apt to oppress the lonely traveler, driving in a sense of his own littleness by contrast with its solitary immensity. But if the girl felt herself shrinking to microscopic dimensions, saw herself crawling like an insect on the face of the great whiteness, she could always look back on the town, which rose like a black reef from the sea of snow. While reminding her of the human companionship from which she was doing her best to flee, it nevertheless diminished the feeling of isolation, thus acting as a double spur. After every backward glimpse she would lay on the whip, and, developing unsuspected speed, the pony carried her in the course of a couple of hours into woodland country where poplar copse limited and diversified the frozen prospect. Almost before she knew it—but not a whit too soon, for the short northern day was already drawing to a close—she raised Norway's road-house, a comfortable "Red River frame"

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of logs, that sat with its stables in the embrace of a poplar bluff.

The sight of a woman, white and pretty at that, traveling alone on a winter trail brought all of Norway's occupants out of doors, and at her first glimpse of the three dark, gentle-eyed girls Gabrielle was ready to subscribe to the Scotch factor's praises. Uttering soft exclamations of wonder at her hardihood, they extracted her from the wrappings in which she now sat like a frozen chrysalis; then, dark having closed in while she was being warmed and fed, they carried her off to the one real bedroom in a circle of a hundred miles. Despite this proud distinction, it had little in common with her own luxurious chamber at home. The steads of its two beds were made of poplar poles. The furnishings were merely boxes draped with chintz. Yet the sheets, blankets, cotton curtains were all as white as the lime-washed log walls, and Gabrielle, who was usually quite "finicky" about her sleeping - arrangements, readily accepted a timid invitation from Lois, the youngest girl, to bed with her.

If, moreover, her resentful attitude toward the men of the town might have seemed hypersensitively unreasonable to an impartial observer, no fault could have been found with her present behavior. In five minutes she was head over heels in one of those bedroom conversations that are so dear to the heart of the eternally femi-



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nine. Puffing his pipe in one corner of the big mud hearth down-stairs, Norway, a grizzled old half-breed, wondered at the steady buzz that was punctuated on occasion with bursts of soft laughter.

The cause, a filmy nightdress that was little more than a frothy sea of lace bounded by shores of baby ribbon, was not, however, for him. When Gabrielle produced it from her suit-case three pairs of dark eyes distended with admiration that lacked a particle of envy, and not until they had admired both it and the superior whiteness of the shoulders it failed to hide did Marie, the eldest, register an objection.

"It ees beautiful, oh yes, but not to be worn in the wintaire. You would freeze."

In its place she offered a woolen garment that felt, to Gabrielle, like a blanket, but after the fire died below and the water-pails began to freeze inside the house she not only appreciated its warmth, but also snuggled closer to and thanked her lucky stars for the gift of her pretty sleeping partner. Despite the fifty or sixty degrees of frost that spread her breath in a white hoar over her hair and the blankets she slept warmly, breakfasted next morning with keen appetite on hot bannock, tea, and bacon; took the trail immediately thereafter, quite happy for the feminine association, warmth of heart and body, with a good prospect of remaining so by reason of the hot stones the girls had prepared for her feet and hands.

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Morning had broken fair and frosty and not so very cold for those regions, with the spirit at thirty-six below. When the sun slipped out of his cold, white blankets, a golden frost veil had hung in mid-air, and a pair of "sun dogs" gave warning of hard weather to come.

"It ees too mooch to tell," Norway said, tucking her in. "The storm he may bre'k like ol' hell to-day or hol' off for a week. I t'ink you mek' Winnipegoos all right. If it comes queek, then ees there one freighter's cabin twenty miles out where you will find fire an' grub. Ten miles farther the tote trail swings off nor'east, an' after that the Winnipegoos trail, he ees no dam' good."

To Gabrielle, rattling along the hard trail that presently laid ten miles of silver ribbon along the dead flatness of Lake Manitoba, foreboding seemed absurd. Exhilaration induced by the rapid motion plus bright sunlight and sharp, clear air, put her in happier mood. Also Romance, the chameleon, who had peeped at the half-breed girls through the insertion and lace of that wonderful nightdress, now looked at her out of their gentle eyes. Spinning along she wove small romances into the warp of their simple lives, and when she tired of that she still had Nell and Byron, the picturesque life of the forts, to fill her mind. Absorbed in which preoccupations, she never noticed a stealthy hissing which grew and strengthened till it silenced the groan of her sled.

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It was the drift, imperceptible in its beginnings, invisible to an untrained eye. She did notice that it was growing colder, for cold in the northland is a question of wind, and the slight breeze drove the frost in through her furs. Wrapped in her thoughts, however, she barely noticed when the sun went out, gave no significance to the low groans and creakings of the poplar into which the trail had plunged after leaving the lake.

Shortly thereafter she came swinging around a bluff upon the freighter's hut. Merely a log shack with a lean-to stable behind, it raised only half of its walls from the heart of a drift, the mud chimney was smokeless and the doorway blocked with snow. But had it appeared less inhospitable, a vivid recollection of the Portage lumberjacks was more than sufficient to drive her on. Laying the whip on the pony, which would fain have stopped, she fed it the oats Norway had tucked in the back of the sled in the shelter of a copse a mile farther on.

That was the last shelter, for, beyond, the trail ran in open country where the rising wind had things all its own way. Strengthening as she proceeded, it picked up the snows of the last storm and hurtled them southward in a solid sheet. Over the icy surface of the "tote trail," which rode level with the snows, the drift slid harmlessly or banked only at sharp turns. But at the forks where the poorly beaten Winni-

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pegosis trail branched off, the latter was buried out of sight. When, already very cold and just a trifle frightened, she passed about midafternoon, there was nothing to choose between it and any other quirk of the trail. She was completely unconscious of its very existence.

Later it began to snow; and the wind roared in shrieking crescendos, piling one on the other to the full pitch of a "blizzard." Snatching ten-foot drifts from under the lee of the copse, from the prairies a foot of snow, it whirled and wheeled, beat and churned the mass till the air was thick as cheese. By this time Gabrielle was genuinely frightened; but, sustained by the thought that she must be nearing McDonald's, she held on till the short day faded and inky blackness shrouded the whirling chaos.

The blizzard's giant monotone drowned all sound, and at last, from sheer lack of contrast, it registered itself merely a vibration in her ears. But for the jerking of the lines under the pony's distressful snorts she would have fallen into utter despair. That, however, comforted her with a sense of brute companionship. Though it was headed directly into the storm, the plucky little beast held the trail with all of the pertinacity of its stubborn race, and had there been any port ahead it would have fetched it with instinct just as sure. Being none, its obstinate courage worked harm, for all the time Gabrielle was growing colder. Long ago she had absorbed

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the last of the heat from the stones, and now, turning traitor, they helped to chill her feet. Her hands were so numbed that she could not feel them, and she drove with the reins twisted around her wrists.

"Surely the stopping-house cannot be much farther."

Again and again, with all of the agony of a prayer, it fell from her stiffening lips, and always the words were snatched away and lost in the wild black whorl of the storm, so she was denied the dubious comfort of hearing her own voice. Blind and deaf, nearly as cold as the dead, she was drawn through a dark void to the final catastrophe which came when, whirling at last from the cutting edge of the wind, the pony upset the "jumper" and sent her headlong into deep snow.

Half frozen and completely numbed, the instinct of self-preservation still asserted itself, and she struggled up—but so slowly that the pony had gained a hundred yards on the back trail before she stood erect. Blindly she tried to follow. But her numbed limbs refused to obey her will. Stumbling, she fell across the trail and lay, conscious yet, but, oh, so tired and sleepy! For a few minutes vague dreams of places and people flitted through consciousness, then she passed completely under the merciful anesthesia which precedes death by frost.

### CHAPTER III

**A**BOUT two hours after Gabrielle's departure Norway stepped outdoors and took a look at the weather. At each end of the house a stove-pipe was ejecting smoke in white gasps with a sound similar to the exhaust of a locomotive. Always a sign of intense cold, it combined with the low, stern hiss of the drift to produce the anxiety that suddenly filled every wrinkle in the old fellow's face.

"I no lak' hees looks." He wagged his head dubiously at Lois, who had followed to the doorway. "I was the great fool to let her go. Already comes the dreeft, an' soon it will be blowing ol' hell. *Oui*, I was one dam' fool. Before she comes to the forks the Winnipegoos trail will be buried under."

"Then will she be lost." His anxiety set a reflection of fear in her soft eyes. "You must heetch, *père*, an' go after her."

"Heetch?" He threw up hands and shoulders. "Heetch what—the cat or the dog? Your brother, Pierre, took the shaganappy yesterday to mek' the round of hees traps. The buckskin? A curse on his unlucky soul! He ees gone lame

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all week. There remains only my feet. Forty years ago I could have caught her—*oui*, even with this long start—but not now.”

“Oh, what can we do?”

“Nothing”—he crossed himself—“but trust the good God to stop her at the first freighter’s hut.”

“An’ surely He will, *père*. She is so beautiful, the good God would never destroy such a pretty thing.”

It is to be feared that the wonderful night-dress was included in the picture of beauty that filled her mind’s eye. Yet was she none the less sincere. Her hands, clutched to her breast, powerfully expressed her concern and fear. The thought that clouded her dark face told that she was struggling to find some means of rescue. After a few seconds she broke out in a little scream:

“Oh, the freighters, *père*! Red Dominique comes to-day. I hear bells. But not hees. *Oui*, ’tis the double string on the Boss’s ponies.”

When, a minute later, his duller ear picked out the jangle Norway divined the fact. “By Gar! They came out to the first cabin las’ night.”

In the roomy “jumper” which slid out, still a minute later, from behind a bluff a second man sat with the Boss. Leaving the other two to come on with Dominique, he had brought along the fellow whose comment had caused Gabrielle such anger and confusion, and as, reining in, he

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sat listening to Norway, there came into view striking differences between the two. While both faces were raw-tanned by wind and frost, the lumberjack's was also blotched with the purple flush of dissipation. Between the open hazel eye and thoughtful brow of the one and the small, choleric eyes, beaked nose, general air of low cunning that stamped the other, there was a vivid contrast which even Lois felt without quite knowing why. While retreating from the fellow's rude stare she even put her impression into words:

"I no lak' heem, that man."

A certain nervousness that had showed both in the Boss's greeting and manner gave place to anxious gravity. "That's bad," he commented upon Norway's report, "for we're sure in for a blizzard. If she takes the Winnipegoos trail at the forks she'll never make McDonald's, and if she doesn't—"

Taking their cue from the tightening reins, the ponies sprang from a standstill into a gallop. But his voice came drifting back: "Tell the girls not to be afraid. I'll catch her before dark."

His ponies, half blood and half shaganappy, the toughest cross that was ever sired by the devil, undoubtedly did their share toward making good his promise in the next few hours. About the time Gabrielle stopped to feed her beast at one end of the lake they plunged out upon it at the other, and, though the drift now spread like



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sand over the trail, deadening the sledding, they covered the ten-mile stretch at speed that cut her lead in two.

As they shot past the "Forks" the Boss saw there was no break in the drifts of the Winnepigosis trail; in the shelter of a copse farther on he came upon Gabrielle's sled-tracks. "If she only stops at the cabin!" he told himself. But when at dusk it suddenly loomed up dark and solitary, the hope died. Settling back in his seat, he did that which he had not done before, gave the ponies their heads, laid on the whip, nor tightened a line upon them until, after two hours' run through the black storm, they stopped with suddenness that almost sent him out over the dashboard.

It was, of course, impossible to see or hear, but, shoving the reins into his companion's hands, he sprang out and, leaning almost at an acute angle, forced his way against the enormous pressure of the wind to the ponies' heads—to find them rubbing noses with Gabrielle's beast. Leading the animal out into the snow, he worked his own ponies past, then walked on ahead, hopeless, dreading the worst.

Almost as though he had been present, his experience gave him the facts of the case. He saw in his mind the pony turn from the wind, the jumper upset as one runner dropped off the high trail, the girl thrown out and left by the runaway beast. "If she wanders a foot from the trail

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she's gone!" He cried it aloud in sudden panic, and as the wind snatched the words away he tripped and fell over her.

"Can you drive?" He yelled it in the lumberjack's ear after he had climbed with the girl into the sled.

"Me? Drive? I've driven in the Californy Sierras, where they shoot six-horse teams clean down one side of hell and up t'other."

The blizzard grabbed half of the answer, but the Boss gathered the sense. "Then swing 'em round! They'll bolt as soon as they feel a strange hand, but let them run. They'll stop at the shack of their own accord."

And once again the mettled little beasts justified his boast. Guided by instincts unerring as the law of gravitation, they flew through the black whorl of the storm, nor paused till their noses brought up against the door of the lean-to stable. Only the fact that it was closed prevented them, indeed, from wedging themselves in the doorway. Here a poplar bluff broke the force of the wind, and the Boss's sharp orders rose above the howl of the storm.

"Leave them. They'll stand! There's matches and lanterns on a shelf by the door. Light all of them."

Stepping in, he set down his unconscious burden on a rough pole bunk, and the first glimmer of light revealed the lumberjack's curious look. "Is she frozen?"

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"Can't say—yet," he answered, curtly enough, and his voice took a sharper note when, after lighting all three lanterns, the man made to come toward him. "I don't need you. Get that can of kerosene from under the bunk and fill up a watering-pail. After that go out and stable the ponies."

He had already snatched the bedding off a second bunk, and the man's last curious look at the girl as he went out was cut short by the blankets which the Boss hung up on sharp slivers in the edges of the split roof-poles.

"Know a good thing, don't you?" he grumbled, outside. "Me for the horses, and you for the girl."

Within the improvised bedroom the Boss went swiftly to work. It was no time to stickle for conventions. With celerity almost feminine he unloosed the girl's corsage; then, after feeling the faint beat of her heart, he rewrapped her furs about her. Opening her mouth with strong fingers, he next poured a little whisky in from a pocket-flask. A few seconds passed before she swallowed, and all that time he gazed anxiously into her face. Then, with a sigh of relief, he fell to work on her face and hands.

Rising above her cap, the collar of the factor's big coat had saved her ears, and, falling forward with her face buried in the thick fur of the sleeves, it also had escaped with minor frost-bites. A light rubbing with kerosene removed

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in a few moments the deathlike whiteness of three small patches. Her feet and hands presented an appearance much more serious. He frowned while removing the cloth overshoes that were buckled over the ordinary walking-shoes, for, worse than useless, they impeded the circulation they were designed to aid. He was quite prepared for the corpse-like whiteness of her feet and ankles. Under the gold of the lantern they showed like sculptured marble.

“Thank God for the kerosene!”

His utterance was the more fervent because he knew that the can had only been brought in on Red Dominique’s last trip. Had there been time to thaw out snow-water it would have frozen the instant it touched her hands and feet. But freezing, as kerosene does, at a temperature far below the severest cold of the arctics, it would gradually but surely draw out the frost. After arranging her body so that her feet drooped over the edge of the bunk into the bucket he filled two small cooking-pots and placed a hand in each.

This done, he gave her more whisky, which, to his immense satisfaction, she swallowed at once. “Good!” Muttering it, he fell on his knees and fell to rubbing her feet with vigor that threatened to break the smooth, white skin. First one, then the other, now her hands, again back to her feet, he took them in rotation, and as he labored her breathing, which had been almost imper-

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ceptible, deepened and strengthened. Once she sighed, and, looking quickly up, he saw under the glow of the lantern that her face was taking a slight color.

"She's comin' around. Now if the frost didn't go too deep she'll be all right."

Murmuring it, he fell to rubbing harder than ever, so hard indeed that the vigorous chafing drowned the soft closing of the door, the stealthy pad of moccasins across the mud floor. Not till the blanket moved under the lumberjack's hand was he aware of his presence. Springing up then, he filled the opening with his body, drawing the blanket close behind him.

"I said that I didn't need any help!" The flash of his eye accentuated the sharp anger of the tone.

"Didn't you call? I reckoned you did. Must ha' been the wind."

The fellow was lying, and the other knew it. But, though his hard fists bunched at his sides, it was no time for a quarrel. For the girl's sake he took the easy way the line opened. "I didn't, but since you're here I'll use you. Light a fire at once. Not too much at first; the place will have to be warmed slowly."

Though he did not catch the words "You're hell on orders, ain't you?" he did hear the mumble. But, keeping a grip on himself, he stood watching till the other began to whittle shavings. Returning inside the blanket then, he did not

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hear, nor was intended to hear, the fellow's mutter a few minutes later:

"One crack with this—" He was balancing a stick, smooth, polished, as thick as his wrist, that Dominique used for a poker. "Just one crack—" Half rising, he moved a step, his red eyes fixed on the blanket curtain, then paused; moved another step, two, three; then, as a faint clash of bells pierced through the howl of the storm, he hurried back to the mud hearth and fell again to his whittling.

Behind the blankets the girl had just opened her eyes. For some seconds thereafter she lay, her eyes dark with puzzle which presently merged in dislike and alarm. Anticipating an attempt to rise, the Boss had placed his hand upon her shoulder, and now he kept it there despite her struggles.

"You are ill. Don't try to get up."

"It is—you?" Anger, mingled with surprise, in her tone.

"Yes, I. You were lost. I picked you up, half frozen, on the trail a few miles from here. Be quiet, please!" He sharply rebuked a second attempt to rise. "And don't make a scene. We are not alone."

Catching in his turn a second and louder clash of bells, he stepped outside the blankets. "Fire on yet? Good! Dominique and your friends are outside. I hardly thought they'd make it. Take out a light and help them unhitch."

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As the door closed he went back to the girl. "Now, listen. It was not my fault that you got yourself lost, and let me assure you that this is not the end of the adventure. You have had a very narrow escape—"

"But—"

"And"—he went quietly on to quell the mutiny that was waxing in her eyes—"seeing that you are dependent for the time being, you might as well try to behave with decency. Your hands and feet are frozen. It is too early to say how badly yet. But this much I promise you"—he rose to an inspiration—"if you refuse or interfere with my efforts on your behalf you won't die, but you *will* go for the remainder of your days on wooden legs. And your family, as you know, are quite long-lived."

"Brute!" It was the last sarcastic reference that produced the epithet. Yet her anger could not quite kill the sudden horror the prospect set in her eyes. After a moment of thought she asked, "Well, what do you propose?"

"First, to finish drawing out the frost. Then I shall alternate hot foot-baths with cold snow-packs to keep the blood humming through the injured parts. Stagnation is the one thing to be feared."

"And to-morrow you will send me on to Lake Winnipegosis?"

"What in the world are you going to do up there?"

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"Visit Nell Byron. She is wintering there with her husband."

"Oh, I see." His nod indicated mutual acquaintance.

"You will send me on?"

"That depends." He answered with caution. "I won't make a promise I cannot fulfil. By this time to-morrow the blizzard will be at its highest, and it may last out for a week. We have to go on to the camp—to get you the food and shelter you need."

"To the camp—*your* camp?" she exclaimed, in dismay.

"To *my* camp."

"And if I refuse?"

"You will still go."

For a long pause she surveyed him with rising anger. Then, swallowing, she asked, "And if I comply?"

"I will send you on just as soon as your own condition and the weather permit."

"Very well." She heaved a distasteful sigh. "I'll have to endure it."

"Of course, if you prefer wooden legs—"

"Don't be sarcastic. I'm helpless—and you know what I mean."

If he did not he might easily have learned from her shiver of repugnance when she felt his hands kneading and pressing her feet. A filmy cloud had already formed in the kerosene, and this grew with his manipulation till the



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fluid was milky white. It was the frost slowly exuding, and as it came out pains and aches set in, developing after a while into excruciating agony that blinded her to all else.

Barely conscious of rough whispers beyond the curtain, she lay passive under his hands during the long hours he was applying the snow-packs and hot fomentations which Red Dominique prepared at the fire. It is doubtful whether she once heard the half-breed's continual murmur: "The poor leetle gel. By Gar, it ces too bad!" If she felt resentment she was too weak to protest against the hand that wiped the perspiration of agony off her brow. And when at last the pain eased a little she sank into exhausted sleep.

## CHAPTER IV

**S**TEALING quite late through the icy window-pane, the grayest of gray dawns revealed a tamed and submissive Gabrielle. Exhausted by her night of pain, she lay still after she awakened, listless and indifferent, amid the bustle of departure. After taking some beef-tea, brewed by Red Dominique, she relapsed into a doze. She awakened again when, heavily wrapped in blankets and furs, she was lifted and laid on a bed of hay in the bottom of the freighting-sled which had been emptied of all but one quarter of beef required for her future sustenance. With hot stones at her sides and feet and a bottle of hot beef-tea that warmed her hands while providing for present uses, she could defy the blizzard which now made of earth, air, and sky one blanched space.

Her head being entirely covered, there remained to her only feeling which in a dim way kept her informed of their progress. A sideling lunge, for instance, marked the falling of the sled off the trail. Sometimes, however, the frozen surface of a drift would hold up the runners till they had departed wide of the trail,

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and a full stop told that Red Dominique was casting about to find it. Always he succeeded, and the renewed grind of the runners testified to the infallibility of the instinct that goes with Indian blood. At stated intervals, too, the wraps would be drawn back and, raw-red from the sting of the blizzard, the Boss's face would loom like a setting sun in a white snow-flurry while he gave her a drink of beef-tea.

"We shall soon be off the prairies," he told her, about noon. "Once in the shelter of the woods on the hard trail, we shall hitch on the ponies and just rattle along."

A sudden jerk, followed by swift sidelings at sharp turns, marked the change, and had she been able to see she would surely have wondered at the pluck and endurance of the little beasts. After their hard morning's pull through the drifts they flew at a gallop along the aisles of dark spruce which had taken the place of the poplar, and kept it up hour after hour till the day darkened into night. Not seeing, she passed gradually from a waking doze into real sleep that lasted till she was aroused by the flash of a lantern.

Refreshed, she sat up and looked around, but her dazzled eyes gave her at first only dim, gigantic shapes, huge, dark cones of surrounding spruce looming in a silver veil of falling snow. She next caught the black mass of a building, the camp office, and other dim squares of yellow



NATURALLY AS A CHILD CLINGS TO ITS FATHER, SHE CLUNG TO HIM



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windows of the cook-house. Then, as its bearer upheld his lantern, there came into view under its golden aureole a face cast in the likeness of the old Vikings. The steady, sea-blue eyes, aquiline nose, drooping blond mustaches required only the tight fur cap flaked with glittering snow to complete the likeness. The man's great stature, too, fitted the part. Until he bent over her Gabrielle thought him terrifying. But the quiet radiance of his eyes reassured and soothed her. His voice equaled them in gentleness.

"With your permission, miss, I'll just pick you up and carry you right in."

His smile completed her capture. When he lifted her she, Gabrielle, who had fled the Portage from the sight of men, who, later, had repelled the Boss, her savior and benefactor, slid an arm around the man's great bull neck. Naturally as a child clings to its father she clung to him. Naturally as that father, without a shadow of embarrassment, he carried her in and set her down on a pile of furs in front of a blazing fire. Equally remarkable, the Boss, who had stood guard over her, asleep or awake, allowing no other hand to touch her, observed it with a sigh of relief.

"It's good that she has taken to him," he passed inward comment.

As was natural and proper to his position as foreman of the camp, the big Norseman went quietly on assuming more and more of a host's re-

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sponsibilities. A second-generation Norse-American, he had eked out an imperfect education by steady reading, and his speech lacked the barbarous locutions customary in men of his stamp.

"We are not exactly fixed for entertaining." From the bunk which he was making up with a skill that would have done credit to a professional chambermaid he sent his gentle smile across to the girl. "Luckily, we have one decent mattress in the camp."

He did not explain that he had just appropriated it from the bunk of the English clerk, whose Sybaritic taste in this respect was the stock joke of the bunk-houses, and when its owner came in from his dinner he packed him off to warn the cook to "get busy with some soup," then to find new quarters for himself. If his bed-making lacked sheets, the woolly whiteness of the Hudson Bay duffle blankets he took, new, from the store shelves, more than made up for them in that climate. Gabrielle would not listen to his apologies.

"They look so comfortable and warm—and I'm so tired. I should like to go to bed at once."

"After you have had something to eat." The Boss, who had stood looking on, now spoke. "But first I should like Nelson to look at your feet. He has had a great deal of experience with frost-bites."

She consented at once, unwrapping the members herself for the foreman's inspection. Drop-

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ping on his knees, he, on his part, carefully examined them, and if his experience, wide as it was, had covered no members at once so small and delicate, it was not discoverable from his manner. An octogenarian physician could not have achieved an impersonality at once so comforting and reassuring.

"Any pain?" When she replied that only a slight ache combined with great soreness remained, he exclaimed: "Fine! It was the hot-and-cold treatment that did it. You may lose a little skin; but don't fear, it will heal without a scar. What they need now is a rub with olive-oil. There's a bottle up there on the shelf."

The Boss was already reaching for it. But when, after pouring some into his palm, he made to kneel beside her she quickly drew in her feet. Noticing it, the foreman glanced up and so caught her look of revulsion—also the Boss's frown. But, smothering back the flash of temper, the latter passed the bottle over.

"If you will please do it, Nelson, I'll go and see about some broth."

The cook, however, was already at the door.

In these degenerate days, when kings retain merely the shadow of powers and even your emperors go muzzled, it is comforting to know that one autocrat remains to perpetuate their vanished glories. By reason of his emperage of the stomach, the seat of masculine content, the cook of a lumber-camp is able to break or main-



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tain its peace. With him it lies to create a comfortable heaven or seething hell of discontent; because of which both foreman and Boss truckle and bend before him. Jealous, like your true monarch, for his prerogative, nothing but sickness unto death furnishes excuse for a meal to be served outside the cook-house. But, as in thirty years of cooking for the camps this was the first time he had been called upon to entertain a woman, the cook, a round-faced, bullet-headed Irish-Canadian, had come to wait upon Gabrielle himself.

A certain irascibility of eye, characteristic of his profession, faded at the sight of the blue hollows and lines of pain on her face. "Why, ye poor little thing!" he cried, with fatherly pity. "'Tis the harrd time ye've had."

She had made to withdraw her foot from the foreman's hand; but, though she controlled the impulse, it did not escape the cook's quick eye. "Now, ye don't need to be minding me," he reassured her. "I've five of me own back on the farrm be the Georgian Bay. Be the same token ye remind me that strong of Betty, me eldest girl, that I'd be willing to swear the pair av yez twins. Her mother's from French Canada, ye know, an' I'm guessing"—and the guess hit the truth—"that ye've a lick of that same blood in yer own veins."

While he talked he was none the less busy arranging a plate of soup, toast, and, that which

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delighted her most, a pot of tea on a box close to her hand. Standing back with arms folded, he looked on, pleased and smiling, while she drank the tea and trifled with the soup. As yet she had no appetite, but the little she ate did her good, and she might have taken more if she had not become suddenly drowsy in the middle of her meal. Weak as well as sleepy, she would have collapsed but for the Boss's quick hand. But when, stooping, he tried to lift her to carry her to the bed she pulled away with repulsion so noticeable that the cook, in his turn, raised surprised brows.

"Looks like the Boss had been getting fresh." The thought passed through the latter's mind, but it was ejected the moment it was formed. "No, no, he ain't av that sort."

"If you will, please?" She looked at the foreman, and, as before, the Boss stepped back. "You are very kind"—her glance, as she sat in her bunk, went from foreman to the cook—"and I am not going to trouble you any more to-night. I can do everything else for myself."

"An' dinner's been waiting an hour for the two av yez," the cook helped out. "Come now, or go without."

Nevertheless, he consented to wait till the foreman rigged a blanket partition around the bunk. That done, he marched them off with scant allowance of time to say good night.

Half an hour ago the last of the teamsters

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had eaten and gone off to bed, and, crossing over to the cook-house, their way lay through a dark and silent camp. The half-dozen bunk-houses loomed black and lightless in a gray veil of falling snow. Having washed up and set the tables for breakfast, the two "cookees" had followed suit, and when they entered the cook-house a single reflector-light at the end of the long room lit the great ceiling barks, heavy log walls, and long tables set with double rows of tinware. As he had to rise at three, the cook turned in to his own bunk in the corner next the stove the instant he had served dinner.

At first their talk dealt altogether with business matters, for, with that natural delicacy which often resides under the roughest exteriors, the foreman made no reference to either Gabrielle or her queer behavior. From a long trek it came round to her, at last, through a question of supplies.

"We had to take Dominique's sled for—the young lady." The Boss explained the freighter's absence. "He's coming on with her pony, my sled, and three new men. He ought to get in before midnight, and to-morrow he can go back for his load."

From this opening he went on to describe the events of the preceding night, and not until he concluded did the foreman hint at that which was in his mind. "Lucky for her that it was you that picked her up. No man without medical knowl-

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edge could have cared for her like that, and without it she'd sure have lost both feet. But say—you'll excuse me if I seem fresh?—but she doesn't seem any too grateful. If it was any one else—"

"You'd think I'd insulted her? Don't be afraid to say it."

"I'm not. I've known you—let me see, ever since I've been bossing camps for your father, and that puts you back knee-high, and in all that time I've never seen or heard you do or say anything that would give offense to a woman. It isn't in you, and yet—she couldn't treat you worse if you were—"

"Her husband."

The significance of the accent caused the foreman to look up in quick surprise. "You don't mean to say—"

"I do. She's my wife."

"But—but"—he stammered painfully—"there was never a whisper—about the marriage?"

"Wasn't likely to be—the way it turned out. You see"—he shrugged, and went on with lightness that was plainly affected—"in the words of the story-books, she left me at the altar."

"I—I'm sorry. If I'd known—" Every line of his strong, good face betrayed such pained embarrassment that the other had to laugh.

"Don't worry." He put out his hand. "As you say, you've known me ever since I was knee-high, and next to my father there's no person in all this world has a better right to my confidence.

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I didn't tell you so much, Nelson, without intending to tell you everything—besides, as she is here, it is necessary that you should understand the situation.

“I won't have to go very far back for the beginning, for you know how my father tried to make a bad doctor out of a good lumberman by entering me for a medical course in Montreal. I was going to say that it was there we met, but unfortunately it wasn't, for if we had the affair would have had an entirely different termination. But I did meet her cousin, who, over a year afterward, was responsible for our acquaintance. She lived with her family there in Montreal.

“It's trite, I know, to exclaim at the light chances that turn the current of a life, nevertheless it's a pity the meeting was deferred. I'd been out in the woods so much with you and the old dad that I'd sort of slipped up on my wild oats, was green as grass so far as women were concerned, and was just in right condition to profit by the acquaintance of a nice girl. But all that year I ran with the medical crowd, always the wildest in any college. Do you remember Joe Viguier?”

“Old Joe who used to come up for the spring log drives on the Matteawan? Of course.”

“Did you ever see his daughter?”

“Susanne? Yes, about five years ago. She was a fine animal of a girl—lusty, big-limbed, with deep black eyes, and a smile that was always

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saying, 'Meet me around the corner.' But I've heard of her since—nothing to her credit."

"Well, in his last years Joe ran a tavern down by the riverside, but when I first went there with a couple of medicos he was away on the drive where he got drowned, and I didn't know that Susanne was his girl. But if I didn't know them, both she and her mother—a bad old woman—knew me, and looking back on it all I'm inclined to think that they laid their plans from the very beginning to trap me—not in the way it actually occurred, perhaps, for at first Susanne affected the modest and proper with a view of drawing me on to marriage. But her reputation was already too much to the bad for that, and after she once made up her mind that the fellows had put me wise, she threw the proprieties to the four winds and took the sowing of my wild oats into her own hands.

"I'll have to confess that she did a good job. From a comparatively innocent and well-intentioned youth she turned me in less than a year into a decidedly tough young man. Whereas previously I had labored to fulfil my father's ambition I now cut classes, smoked to excess, drank heavily, and, after taking a leading part in a disgraceful row, was finally expelled from college.

"I don't have to tell you how it hurt the old dad. You have often heard him planning for my future. But instead of casting me off like the

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fathers of fiction he took it very quietly, and let me follow my natural bent. After a stiff lecture that kept me guessing as to his intentions he placed me in charge of one of his Ottawa camps.

"Of course he knew that would keep me away from Montreal and Susanne, and it did—all that winter and the spring months till the end of the log drive; and when I did return—queer how contrary things run—the first fellow I met was Gabrielle's cousin, and he took me to a dance that very night at her house.

"This is a cynical age. Your psychologists of fiction have analyzed and dissected love till there's little left of poor Cupid but bones and a corpse—which probably will be completely cremated in the next novel of passion. Those books make a fellow wonder if the authors were ever young. If they ever did experience the cool sweetness of a first love the very memory of it seems to have shriveled and burned up in the flame of grosser affairs. But call it sentimental or not, as you like, the fact remains that a young fellow's first love is usually as pure and passionless as that of a mother for her child.

"At least mine was. An only son without sisters to bring me in contact with their girl friends, I had missed the half-dozen calf loves that come to a boy in his teens. You might expect that Susanne would have killed all that in me. But somehow she hadn't—I suppose

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because a fellow instinctively places a gulf wide as the poles between good girls and the other kind.

“Into my feeling for Gabrielle entered all of the tender, infinitely shy worship of boy-and-girl love. When, that first night, I sat out two dances with her and watched, as we talked, her dark lashes fluttering like butterfly wings across her shy glances, I would as soon have plunged a knife into her as have profaned her cool virginity with a base thought. If the play of her breath on my cheek, intimate contacts of the succeeding waltz, thrilled and intoxicated me, it was still all clean and healthy feeling. From the gutters of passion into which Susanne had cast me Gabrielle’s fine young womanhood lifted me with the attraction of a powerful magnet. Going home that night, and many another night, I bitterly repented of the gross folly that barred me from approaching her with clean hands.

“For I had made up my mind to win her, and, as she had taken to me also at first sight, I didn’t let any grass grow under my feet. In two weeks we were engaged, and, as her family were willing and the old dad wished to see me settled before, as he thought, I had time to mix up with any foolish entanglements, the date was set for an early wedding. She comes of old French stock, blended in later years with an even mixture of Yankee and Scotch. Ever since the Hudson Bay Company took its charter from the hand



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of King Charles they have been in it. As factors, clerks, commissioners, governors, some one of them has always held a position of importance, and the remainder have done so well at it that no less than four of the present generation were at McGill's with me. So because of the importance and age of the family, and my old dad's position in the commercial world, the Montreal papers gave the engagement a great deal of space—so much, in fact, that Gabrielle's distaste for the notoriety caused her to arrange for a quiet wedding in an obscure little church.

"I don't believe it possible for any man to be happier than I was during those two weeks. Unconscious of the trap that was being laid for my feet, I lived in a happy dream up to the moment that I returned home, happy and uplifted from a last call on my sweetheart, to find Susanne's mother waiting in the hall the night before the wedding. Just how she learned the date I don't know, but suppose that she established some sort of communication with the servants in Gabrielle's house. At any rate, there she was, a stout, hard-featured, evil-eyed old woman, whose every line and wrinkle told of baseness.

"Her wicked eyes snapped and burned from a combination of nervousness and false anger when she spoke. 'Yes,' she demanded, when I admitted that I was to be married, 'and what are you going to do for your child?'

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"Astounded, I stared at her for some seconds, and when I finally gathered her meaning it was more from the low cunning of her expression than the sense of her words. 'Why—why'—I stammered in my surprise—'this is impossible—ridiculous; I haven't even seen Susanne for nearly a year.'

"She made capital out of my hesitation. 'No wonder your tongue balks at the lie. But it won't serve you, my pretty fellow. There's witnesses that will swear to your comings and goings at the tavern.'

"It was a hold-up, of course, of the rankest kind, but the very impudence of it aroused my curiosity, and there was nothing to be lost by feeling her out. 'How old is the child?' I asked.

"But she dodged. 'You will find out—at the proper time.'

"The last time I was at the tavern there had been neither sign nor hint of its existence, and, feeling pretty sure of myself, I drew her on. 'And what might be your idea of "the right thing"?'"

"'Five thousand dollars, paid here and now.'

"'That's a large sum to raise at a moment's notice.'

"She put away the objection with an evil grin. 'Not for your father. He could give a check for ten times the amount.'

"That was the game—to bleed the good old dad—just as though he hadn't suffered enough

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through me. So far I had restrained my anger, and it would have been better had I held it in till the end, for nothing but cold logic serves with a blackmailer. But the thought of the dad being held up for thousands and scandalized on the eve of my marriage overpowered my discretion. Too angry to speak, I flung open the door and banged it in her evil face after she went out, cutting off a parting threat:

“‘You’ll be sorry for this—’

“Her vindictive passion ought to have warned me, and I can assure you in any case that my reflections that night were anything but pleasant. They were due, however, altogether to remorse, for I was absolutely certain of the physical impossibility of their establishing the charge. I had failed, however, to allow for the ignorance and hate that may influence a blackmailer as powerfully as greed. Also, in their lack of imagination, they may still have expected to make money out of the scandal. Cutting a long story—as we came down the aisle, the next morning, after the marriage, Susanne herself rose suddenly from a pew and thrust a crying baby into Gabrielle’s arms.

“‘You are his wife! Now look after his child!’”

“Phew!” The foreman, who had listened with increasing attention, emitted a whistle. “Lordy! But that is what you might rightly call one hell of a situation.”

“That’s how it felt, and for Gabrielle it was

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even worse. Her people are not Catholic, but she was educated in the convent, and you know what that means. The shock must have been terrible, yet she did not break down. On the contrary, when her father tried to take the child she drew away and turned to me.

“Is it yours?” She asked it quietly as that.

“It wasn’t, and my answer carried conviction. But when she continued her quiet examination, ‘What were your relations with the mother?’ I was stumped, and could make no answer.

“She gave me time enough, but as she stood still holding the child her expression gradually changed from pleading to scorn. ‘Then your innocence was merely accidental. Come!’ And, beckoning Susanne to follow, she carried the child into the sanctuary.

“Till she reached the door I stood stunned, unable to think of anything or to do anything—the thing had come so suddenly—and after it closed behind her I still stood till the whisperings among the guests aroused me. Leaving the church, then, I drove home in the very carriage that was to have taken us to the station, and here again crooked fate lay in wait for me. After changing my clothes I left the house with no other intention than of clearing the blood from my brain by exercise. But only a few paces down the street I met one of my old friends of the medical school—the hardest drinker of them all.

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"It was unfortunate. As a matter of fact, the scandal never got into the papers; moreover, after a little quiet questioning by the priest, eked out by my old dad's threat of an investigation by the police, Susanne exonerated me from the paternity of the child. If I had only kept straight Gabrielle might have been persuaded to overlook it, for both her own family and the old dad were pleading with her all the time. But meeting this man in the moment of my bitter humiliation, I fell an easy victim. If the ten days' debauch we entered on went no farther than perpetual intoxication it was merely because, a confirmed alcoholic, his desires were bounded by unlimited liquor, for I was ripe and ready to go the pace. However, it was more than sufficient. Before the old dad succeeded in rounding me up I had been seen by several of Gabrielle's friends and relatives, and that settled my case. Ever since I have been out here trying to forget it."

He had begun in the passionless manner of one speaking of dead events; but as he proceeded his voice grew tense, and into it crept the unmistakable note of suffering. The light sweat which broke all over his face plainly told that this had been no light love. Undoubtedly it was to conceal emotion that he took a swallow of coffee and went on eating.

The foreman, too, resumed his dinner. The glance of pity he sent across the table expressed

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warm sympathy. But when, after a season of thoughtful chewing, he spoke, it was in defense of the woman. "I don't reckon that you, yourself, have blamed her? That was an awful big package to hand in one lump to an innocent girl."

"No, I haven't. She followed her own feeling as to what was right. Only sometimes I can't help wishing that she'd been just a whit less conscientious." He smiled slightly, repeating the word: "'Conscientious'? Do you know that, though we never lived for one moment together, she still considers herself my wife? Signing the register at Joe Lacrosse's, she began to write 'Mrs.,' as though she balked after the 'M' and left it unfinished, she still wrote down my surname."

"And conscientiousness isn't a fault in a wife," the foreman commented. "Come over to the stove to smoke."

After they were settled he sat with his enormous hands crossed over one knee, watching the smoke rise in blue spirals through the gold of the lamplight. In his big blue eyes were shadows of thoughts that have puzzled sage and philosopher, distracted Church and State for a thousand generations. For a long time they raised and lowered, and when at last he gave his thought utterance it touched as closely on the crux of the problem as any deliverances of more learned commentators could do.

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“It’s a queer business, this sowing of wild oats. I know how you feel—the way every decent young chap ought to feel when he measures up his imperfections against the perfect innocence of a well-raised girl. Yet—do you remember the professor that came with your father to the Matteawan camp to study our end of the lumber trade? Well, him and me had many a crack about things in general during the long winter evenings, and among others he touched on ‘wild oats.’

“He’d a theory that civilization hasn’t touched man’s instincts, that they run contrary to what he called ‘social morals.’ According to his way of looking at it, wild oats are a heap more natural than tame ones, and he went so far as to say that if ever the race arrives at the point where they are not, there won’t be virility enough left for it to reproduce itself. He said another thing that I’ve seen for myself—that sooner or later the average of men sow a wild crop. If they don’t scatter it young, they’re mighty likely to come back to it when they are old. I’ve known lads that mealy-faced, you’d have sworn butter wouldn’t have melted in their mouths, to break out at forty and go to it to beat all hell and the preachers; and the worst of it is, if they start in that late, they’re likely to keep on sowing till the land’s wore out and the devil forecloses his mortgage.

“Not that I’m holding that the rules should

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be relaxed. It's taken thousands of years to frame 'em, and without them marriage would drop into a go-as-you-please. After a young chap has settled down with his little wife it's up to him to walk straight and govern himself according. Only if he has made a slip or two in the past it's not going to do him any good to go brooding about it, and it may prove a hindrance. If you made one fool of yourself that time, forget it—otherwise it will act like a drag and may end by pulling you clear off the road. Sure! Forget it and brisk up. Now that she's here—”

“You needn't fear.” He looked up quickly, for strong purpose vibrated in the other's tone. Nodding, the Boss went on: “I put it behind me over a year ago. As you say, now that she is here—it won't be my fault if she gets away.”

“It's going to be some hard to keep her.” A vivid recollection of the girl's gesture of repulsion produced the foreman's comment. “If I can be any help—”

“Just what I was going to ask you.” Hazel eyes snapping with the urgency of his hope, he added: “She really won't be fit to travel for a week at least. But if I try to tell her that, she'll sure put up a fight. But if you—”

“Leave it to me.” The foreman interrupted in his turn. “I'll undertake to keep her quiet for about two weeks. After that—it will be up to you.”

“Up to me,” the other echoed.



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For a time silence fell once more between them. Rifting down through a blue haze of tobacco-smoke the lamplight showed Ferrier's face tinged with the warmth of happy reflections. For some minutes the hissing kettle and crackling fire had it all to themselves. Then the foreman spoke:

"There's one other thing to think of. What are you going to tell to the camp?"

"Nothing."

The other nodded. "It won't be necessary. There's not going to be a pile of introducing. As for me, I know nothing, either. Just keep on calling her 'Miss.'"

"That's the idea." Rising, Ferrier knocked the ashes out of his pipe. "Time to turn in. It's a shame that I kept you up so late."

But the foreman shook his head. "I haven't finished my smoke, and when I do I shall roll right in with the cook. He's that lost to the world he'll never know it till he wakes up. You go on, for there's neither locks nor bolts on the door, and I wouldn't feel comfortable to know that she was sleeping there alone. But don't wake her, and to-morrow we'll rig up a partition so's she can be real private."

After the door closed he returned to his pipe, and the reflection that inspired his sage nod at the stove ran something like this: "Don't it beat hell? There's some that sow a bumper crop; others keep right on seeding and get away

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with it—live and die respected. And here a single, solitary wild oat comes up in a night and twists into a gin that trips him up on the morning of his marriage. Lordy! lordy! what's the use?"

Later a shake of his great blond head expressed his appreciation of the girl's will and character. "Jealous French and iron Scotch flavored with New England. But the Boss is no kitten, either. Humph! It's going to be some scrap."

## CHAPTER V

“**I** BELIEVE that you are plotting to keep me here! I *won't* stay!”

The flash and flush that emphasized Gabrielle's declaration some ten days later, testified more eloquently than her words that the “scrap” of the foreman's prediction was on. She also stamped her foot. But besides being still sensitive, the member was now incased in a soft moccasin and arctic sock—cut down by the foreman's huge but skilful fingers from the smallest pairs in stock—and, striking hard on the frozen mud floor, the effect was nullified by her sudden pained “Ouch!”

Her anger was not mitigated by the sudden turn-about, by means of which Ferrier and the foreman sought to hide their grins. Knowledge of their amusement inflamed her to further defiance. “Mr. Templeton tells me that Red Dominique is going out to-day. I shall go with him.”

There was no amusement in the glance, both sent at the English clerk, nor anything complimentary. “Magpie!” plus a few adjectives, about expresses their feeling; to which Ferrier added, in thought, “Why didn't I warn him?”

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He now set himself to rectify the error. "He meant that Dominique will *try* to go out. It took him eight days to come in, and a new storm has just set in. Though we don't feel it here in the sheltered timber, a wild blizzard is blowing outside. Dominique was born in this country, and he tells me that only once before, and that thirty years ago, has he seen such a winter. The trail outside is buried three feet deep, and it's a gamble whether he'll ever get through. If he does it will be only after enduring hardships that would kill any woman. I simply cannot let you go."

"By my friends?" While answering him she looked at the foreman, a custom of hers. "The Byrons are expecting me, and my father hasn't heard from me since I—"

"Oh yes, he has." Ferrier anticipated the ending. "I sent out a wire by Dominique on his last trip. And the Byrons are snowed up in Winnipegosis. It is doubtful whether they will get another mail out before spring."

But, instead of appeasing, his forethought increased her irritation, by suggesting the implication that would be given to her presence there in his camp. "If I don't go with Dominique it will be because I am prevented."

Issuing the ultimatum, she looked him squarely in the face. Meeting her glance just as squarely, he made steady answer: "If you do it will be because you are the stronger."

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Red lips compressed into a thin, scarlet line, gray eyes black as their dark lashes, she maintained her gaze till the dawn of admiration behind the cold resolve of his eyes forced her to a finish. "You mean that? You will keep me by force?"

"I will."

"Very well. I am not going to engage in a scuffle. But that doesn't alter the fact that in my feeling I am being held here from this moment by force. But let me tell you"—it may have been unintentional, but her glance wandered over to the English clerk—"you will be sorry."

His expression, as a matter of fact, was not particularly joyous, for victory in this clash of wills brought no fruits. If interpreted, his feeling would have run: "I couldn't be any worse than I am." Concealing it under a shrug, he returned to the list of stores that he and the foreman were preparing for Dominique. Thus he did not see her enter the little bedroom they had partitioned off one end of the store. When she came out again wearing her fur cloak and a scarf wound about her neck and ears he glanced his surprise.

"Don't be afraid." She read both his and the foreman's apprehension. "I am not so silly as to try and walk out. But if I *have* to stay here I must begin to take exercise."

"But you don't know the trails," the foreman had already begun, when Ferrier nudged him.

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"If you will wait till we finish this list I shall be glad—"

"No," she interrupted. "I heard you say last night that you would be unusually busy to-day. I can go by myself—or if Mr. Templeton—" She glanced at the clerk.

"Go on." Ferrier answered the young fellow's questioning look, and as the door closed on the pair he heaved a sigh of relief. "Thank the gods, that's over. Before she gets back we'll have Dominique off. Bacon, you said? Looks as though we might be snowed in. Better order fifty sides. And say, wasn't it lucky that we did the bulk of our teaming on the first snows?"

As the foreman did not answer at once, he looked up. But the Norseman's huge bulk intervened between him and the window, so he missed a little play that was being enacted outside. Down on his knees in the snow the clerk was tying Gabrielle's moccasin strings. The eyes that looked down upon him were colder than the clerk's freezing fingers, but her attitude, slightly bent over as if in eager conversation, so belied their frost that the foreman was almost deceived. Not until she slipped on a sideling curve and repulsed with a gesture almost peremptory the clerk's proffered arm did he gather the motive. The laugh he smothered in his throat accompanied the thought:

"Missed it that time, little lady."

He answered aloud: "Yes, better get fifty

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sides. It will ease her nerves to get out in the cold air. She'll come back that tired and hungry she'll think of nothing but food and sleep."

He guessed aright. After ten days of close confinement, with nothing in the way of diversion but the bickerings of Swede lumberjacks over the store prices, Gabrielle found the motion and bite of air delightful. Though the mercury thermometer outside the store had gone completely out of business, it was the dry cold of the arctic, hardly noticeable as long as she kept moving; and if the snow fell steadily, again it was the frozen snow of the North, fine as sifted salt—so very fine, indeed, that it hardly obstructed vision, merely softened the outlines and invested with mystery the black cones of surrounding spruce. While outside the drift was driving along in a blinding white flurry, here it merely dusted the iced trails that wound like twin snakes through the forest. Relieving the rigors of the prospect, a splash of red would flash up at the end of some vista where a couple of men were at work, bare-handed and stripped to their lumbermen's shirts. Then, rising above the querulous moan of the wind in the treetops, would come the strident groan of a lumber-sled spaced by whip-crackings and the driver's cheerful curses. From the top of a load piled high as a house he would look down upon them in passing, his red face looming like a setting sun through the steam of his sweating beasts. Then gradu-

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ally the noise would die down, leaving the wind once more in command of the forest.

"Jerusalem! What a load!" As one sled went creaking by, the clerk drew her attention to its massive construction. "They are seven feet wide between the runners, with eleven-foot bunkers. Six teams couldn't start that load in raw snow, but the runners, you see, are rounded and run on ice. Every night we run a watering-cart along the trails. It's all Nelson's invention—sleds, runners, iced tracks. Mighty clever, too, don't you think?"

Though not particularly interested in sleds, Gabrielle had developed a great liking for their maker, the foreman, and she set forth her opinion with no uncertain sound. "I think he is *dear*, so enormous and strong, yet so gentle and kind."

"Gentle and kind?" The clerk achieved the variety of cachinnation known to specialists as the "horse-laugh." "Yes, while things are going all right. But, taking it by and large, they usually aren't—especially when you are working Swedes. I don't know however the Swede got his mild reputation. In books they are always put down as that. But as a matter of fact they are irritable as scorpions.

"Just the week before you came Big Ole and Hans, two loaders, raised a rumpus about the food, which was good enough, and you ought to have been here to see Nelson do them up.



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They are whales, both of them, but he handled them as if they were girls. Kind and gentle?" He repeated the laugh. "And the Boss? He's no chicken. When a couple of the other loaders started to help Ole, the Boss jumped right in and knocked one of them cold. For a while it looked like a general riot, and if it had been up to your humble servant, he'd have certainly made tracks for a gun. But they quelled it, the two of them, with naked fists."

While the Homeric narrative dealt with the Norseman she had glowed gently. Now her eyes outdid the snows. "I suppose he has his share of animal courage," she answered, coldly. "I'm not interested in fights. Tell me about yourself. How in the world did a man of your education ever come to be in a lumber camp?"

He replied with diffidence that he was afraid that she would not find it very interesting. But of diffidence there are two orders, one the natural expression of a modest nature, another which springs from an ego so pronounced that it shrinks from the thought of underrating. But, as the one is not to be detected from the other at first sight, she persisted and listened with greater interest.

In the recital was nothing unusual. Stripped of unessentials, it followed the usual ineffective curve of the English remittance man, from its beginnings in an upper-class boarding-school to the common end in the "Colonies." In all of

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them—Canada, “the Cape,” New Zealand, Australia—it has been sung, the helpless saga of the “Younger Son.” Debarred by family impoverishment from the bar or army, natural asylum for aristocratic incompetents, inhibited by shoddy caste ideals from trade or useful labor, its motive might very well be cast in the language of Scripture, “Too proud to dig, to beg I am ashamed”—providing that indiscriminate borrowing be excluded from the catalogue of mendicancy.

Exiled to Canada on a “keep-away allowance” which gradually dwindled to nothing, this particular specimen’s career had run the usual gamut of “remittance” luck. Farming, store-clerking, herding, school-teaching, he had tried them all—more correctly, they had *tried* him—and he was still brooding over his discharge from the high position of section hand on a gang that ran out of Winnipeg when Ferrier’s offer of a job saved him from that last refuge, the Northwest Mounted Police.

“It was awfully kind of the Boss,” he concluded his Jeremiad, “for you know I was flat broke and didn’t really know where to turn for a meal.”

But if she had known of the real pity that Ferrier had felt for the incapable she was not in the mood to acknowledge it. “He expected to make money off your labor.”

“But he really could have hired much more

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capable fellows. Yes, it was awfully good of him."

Here once more his modesty was a product of incessant browbeating of an unkind fate. Nevertheless, it gained him a few more points in her favor. Neither did she find his helplessness repellent. Her first contact with the species, it appeared to her merely as the result of his being wrongly trained and worse misplaced, and therefore excited her sympathy rather than contempt. Though he was really a year older than Ferrier, his fresh English coloring and general impracticability caused him to appear about five years younger. Though she also was his junior, his helplessness nevertheless appealed strongly to the maternal instinct beneath her girlishness.

In addition to all this, his personality carried for her all the sparkle of novelty. Even his accent, with its drawled tones, she liked, and the sense of racial superiority which somehow made itself felt through his humility did not offend. Then, he knew London thoroughly and had traveled on the Continent, and he talked quite well of the shops and shows, theaters and music-halls, pride and vainglory of the modern Babylon and other metropolitan cities.

It is not to be wondered at that she drew him on, or that while he talked she should have conducted a stealthy, but none the less accurate census of his physical attributes. She already knew that his hair was brown and wavy beneath

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his cap. Now she took closer note of a slightly aquiline nose, healthy colors, fine white teeth, slender but well-formed body. The total produced in her a pleasant impression, and, though as yet it was not sufficiently strong to set in motion the machinery of sex, it sat very well with the purpose she had in mind.

Not that she had set herself, with malice aforethought, to flirt with him. But she did intend to honor him with the lion's share of her company and attention during her enforced stay in camp, and she was woman enough to realize and anticipate with a touch of spite the probable reaction upon Ferrier. Having all of which in her feeling rather than thought—she might have been shocked had it been translated in crude words—she studied him, as aforesaid, until, after a brisk walk, they emerged in a clearing where a force of men was at work “skidding” logs.

To the skidways several ox-teams hauled the logs where a gang of loaders stacked them in piles for the sleds. Though it lacked only a point or so of “forty below,” the men were stripped to the undershirts, and as with furious energy they trundled the logs along the “skids” and heaved them up into place their hot bodies emitted thin steam which condensed into glittering drops that froze and spangled the fluffy woolens.

“That’s Big Ole, with the yellow curls. Hans is working with him. The fellow handling the cant-hook is the one the Boss knocked out.”

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Any of the three Templeton pointed out—for matter of that, almost any one of the loaders, who were all picked for their unusual strength—might have furnished a model for the Farnese Hercules. But where an artist would have gloated over their magnificent proportions, Gabrielle was repelled by and shrank with a touch of fear from their animal masculinity. She watched, by preference, the laboring ox-teams.

One team of old "bulls" in particular earned her admiration by the way in which they twisted and doubled, swung and backed, finally bringing their log out from a veritable labyrinth of stumps at the command of a driver who stood fully fifty feet away. "They are clever and nimble as cats!" she exclaimed, and, though feminine interest is not usually enchained by mere physical happenings, she looked eagerly on till she chanced to catch the driver's eye.

Long ago a sudden translation of their usual oaths into such sweetnesses as "Oh, sugar!" "My heavenly home!" "Drat the beast!" had marked the men's sensibility to her presence. A run on the store had already obtained for the majority a fleeting minute in which to bathe in the rare feminine atmosphere, and now that it was to be obtained without money and without price, it is not to be wondered that they made best use of the opportunity.

Had she looked their way most of them would as a matter of course have governed their eyes.

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But, unconscious of their observation, she stood watching the oxen till reminded of it by the driver's stare. Apart from its rudeness she was unpleasantly affected by the peculiar red lights that gleamed in the fellow's eyes. Then as the mean cunning of the entire face impressed her consciousness, memory stirred, she knew him for one of the three men who had caused her such embarrassment on the Portage street.

In the past two weeks her hypersensitiveness had been almost allayed by the atmosphere of quiet respect in the office. More than all else had the gentle consideration of the giant foreman helped to cure it. But now it flamed out again. Shivering, she loosened her cloak with the same instinctive motion she had used at Lacrosse's.

"I'm cold. Let us walk on."

But even as they hurried on, she felt the eyes following and touching, plucking like miniature hands at her cloak, hands, feet, the tendril of hair that had escaped from under her cap; and in her agitation she walked straight on, nor remembered that she would be exposed to the distressing fire of eyes coming back till it was too late.

"Yes, we can go home another way," the clerk answered her question. "I had intended to take it in any case, for it will bring us past a fall of logs that the choppers have got ready this morning. It's on a hillside, you know. They cut

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the lower trees only half through, then when they drop those on top they knock down a second tier, the second a third, and a whole section of forest comes down on the run. It is something to see."

Very shortly they heard the axes, but it was nearly half an hour, before they came in sight of the choppers. Following in a circle, they were now little more than a mile from camp. Thus it was, that going straight out after he had despatched Red Dominique, Ferrier arrived before them.

By this time her agitation had almost subsided, but shame and resentment were still too strong for her to analyze and know the real character of the feeling. She had not dreamed how much of fear there was in it till she caught sight of Ferrier. Then, in spite of her anger against him, she heaved a sigh of relief that would have made her more angry still if she had stopped to reason about it. Standing to one side behind a tree that sheltered her from further offensive observation, she watched him wherever he went. As he moved here, there, ordering, directing, capable and self-contained, the interest grew in her look. Had a mirror been suddenly thrust before her eyes she would have seen even a leaven of admiration. Unaware of it, however, she looked quietly on till Templeton spoke:

"Capable, isn't he?"

Startled, she turned. Then, realizing that the

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remark had been provoked by her own expression, she blushed with chagrin. "I presume so. But he relies a good deal on Mr. Nelson, doesn't he?"

"Oh, but he could do without him." With that British obtuseness, which takes out of egotism blind to all but itself, he repeated it: "Of course he could. By the way, you and he have the same name—any relation?"

Turning quickly, she hid her face, flaming scarlet. But where a man would have been paralyzed she answered, quietly, "Only by marriage."

"Oh, I see; just a connection. But even at that, wasn't it a coincidence that he should have picked you up on the trail?"

She looked quickly, but his face expressed only mild wonder. She replied with cold composure, "Not when you consider that I was on my way to visit a mutual friend."

"So that was it?"

The remark showed that, if unsuspecting, he had not altogether refrained from speculation. Irritated, she stood ready to nip further examination. But it was unnecessary. A warning crack, and Ferrier's sharp shout, "You, Svenson, get out of the way!" brought the conversation to a natural end.

Fully five minutes ago he had ordered the sawyers who were working on the middle tiers of trees to leave, and all but one, a wooden-headed young Swede, had obeyed. Though he had all



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of time and eternity in which to retrieve the wedges he had left behind, nothing would suit but that he should go back and get them now. When Ferrier shouted his warning the spruce along the crest of the hill was already curving over like a great dark comber. Its line extended nearly a hundred yards each way, so far that even a quick dash could hardly have carried the man from under. But instead of trying it he hesitated, looked one way, the other, finally stood, apparently hypnotized, staring up at the falling trees. Hands clutched under her chin, Gabrielle was gazing at him in horror when Templeton suddenly burst out:

“My God! Look at the Boss!”

Nerves and muscles strung with the super-human power that is born of extremity, the man was shooting down-hill with long leaps that lifted him out and over the snow. Passing the second tier just as the first struck and hurled it over, he beat it to the third. Svenson was now moving slowly sideways, his eye glued to the arc of a single tree, blind to the half-dozen others that were converging upon him; and, leaping right down upon him, Ferrier upset and carried him on down with the force of his rush.

Simultaneously with the clerk's cry a hoarse shout had risen above, to be drowned the next second by the first crash. Gabrielle's scream of horror was drowned by the second. Just before the two went down under a welter of huge trunks,

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broken limbs, threshing branches, she got a vivid glimpse of their faces, the one stupid, red, confused; Ferrier's set hard, lips drawn in a straight line, eyes cold with purpose. Like the flash of a single picture in a cinematograph she caught them before the huge black wave flowed on over them to the foot of the hill.

In ten seconds it passed. Where a stately forest had reigned in solitary gloom, white snow-light now fell over a wrack and ruin of tumbled trees.

That any person could be under it and live was inconceivable. Pale, aghast, yet no stiller than the line of choppers on top of the hill, Gabrielle stood staring, rooted to the spot, till the inconceivable came to pass. For out of a thick lacing of spruce foliage two heads emerged. Ferrier's voice broke the dead silence:

"Never touched us. There's a bit of a gully down here, and I knocked the damned fool into it."

Struggling out, his eye fell for the first time on Gabrielle, unfortunately, for it would have served him better not to have seen her. Had he been killed outright or stricken insensible the profound horror that held her still and mute would have evolved into definite conscious feeling, and she would have known just where she stood. But it passed too quickly. While the horror still gripped her heart and brain, his red head came popping out of the snow with sudden-

## CROSS TRAILS

ness that produced an anti-climax. Through vast relief she was conscious of a touch of the ludicrous. Though the impulse was undoubtedly hysterical, she wanted to laugh, and it was at this particular unfortunate moment that their eyes met.

If he were conscious of it he could scarcely have repressed a natural interrogation. But it was too late now for him to see how she had taken it. He met only a glance of cold resentment, and the next second she turned to the clerk.

“Let us go back to the camp.”

## CHAPTER VI

**F**LUSHED with gladness and relief, the clerk had started forward. He now paused, after his puzzled glance had traveled from her to Ferrier and back again, then followed her along the trail. But if astonished at her coldness his Saxon insensibility to the moods of others prevented him from feeling for its cause. While they were walking back to camp he discussed the incident with enthusiasm that almost drove her mad.

For under her apparent coldness heaved and whirled a maelstrom of feeling, contradictory, chaotic. Shivering with horror one moment, as she pictured the trees breaking down over the two men, she would be swept the next by a swirl of anger when she remembered the interrogation in Ferrier's eyes. The two feelings possessed her in turn, or mingled with others in a confused whirl. Above all things just then she desired solitude, and when the cook called to her from the door of his sanctum as they entered the camp she hailed the interruption with a sigh of relief. In fact she cut off the clerk with a suddenness that left him astonished.

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"I—I haven't—offended you?" he called after her, as she moved on to the cook-house.

"No." She gave him the real reason. "I am upset—wish to be alone."

The means of gratifying her wish presented themselves one minute later through the mouth of the cook. Dropping into the office just after she left, he had drawn the attention of Ferrier and the foreman to a matter which their bachelor ignorance had caused them to overlook.

"'Tis the fine pair yez are," he accused them. "Here's the poor little girl nigh two weeks in camp an' niver enough brains between ye to figure out that she might be wanting to do a little wash for herself."

Being elected on the spot to remedy the oversight by reason of his position and experience as husband and father, he now produced said remedy with kindly frankness that left her quite at ease. "If 'twas me own gurrl I'd be sp'aking the same, so ye're not to be minding me at all, at all. After the noon meal there's niver a sowl in the cook-house till five o'clock. So if there's anny bits av things ye'd be liking to wash, here's fire, water, an' a washboard, with the place to yourself for the whole afternoon."

To her great relief, Ferrier did not appear at lunch, for he had gone down to the river to oversee a break in a piece of trestlework that carried the iced trail across a small gorge; and, though two choppers—who had come in late—added to

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her distress by talking to the cook about the morning's affair, it was still easier to bear than Ferrier's presence. And the foreman, with intuitive delicacy strangely out of keeping with his enormous bulk, helped her by steering the conversation to other things. Nevertheless, despite his kindness, she sighed her relief when he went out, and the cook and his helpers also departed to take their usual siesta in the teamsters' bunk-house.

Till then her thoughts had been whirling in vague snatches like gnats through a mist of distress. But there is nothing like action for clearing the mind, and while she rubbed and scrubbed and hung her pieces to dry over the stove, the surplus blood flowed from her brain into her muscles, mental confusion gave place to orderly thought. What did she think? The cold, clear lights that shine from the face of death are fatal to illusions, and though, with that feminine perversity which defies both law and reason, she hastily wrapped them up in fresh husks of self-deception, she obtained several clear glimpses of truth. Whereas, for instance, she had denied and redenedied that Ferrier could ever be "anything to her again," his narrow escape had filled her with palpitant horror; and when she tried, as she did, to set this perturbation to the score of humanity, honesty forced her to confess that the memory of the Swede's peril left her unshaken.

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Plainly the case had to be reopened in the court of her conscience. If he *was* "something to her" still, there was nothing left for it but to decide his exact status. So she went at it, and while the arguments pro and con whirled back and forth, subject to the stern rulings of conscience, she learned among other things that Ferrier's condemnation was not based altogether on the highly moral grounds she had sought to find it. From whatsoever angle she studied it she found herself looking, in the end, not at the case, but into the dark, handsome face of Susanne Viguiet. And whenever this happened, reason fled, her thought relapsing into the original chaos. Always the investigation ended with a mental cry, "I cannot, I *will* not forgive him!"

She was restating this vigorous conclusion for the fortieth time when the door opened and Ferrier entered. Her back was toward him, and, as the hollow sound of her rubbing dominated the pad of his moccasins, she was not aware of his presence until a current of frosty air struck her warm neck. Though scarcely two seconds elapsed before she looked around, he had yet time to take in the pretty picture of domesticity she presented, with sleeves rolled above white elbows, dress open and tucked low about her smooth neck, all accentuated and illumined by the flush of exertion that had deepened her usually delicate color. A ravel of hair that fell in a web of gold around glossy brown coils com-

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pleted a picture that would have passed anywhere for contented young wifehood at its daily toils. Perhaps it recalled for him some visioning of the happy days preceding their marriage. Wistfulness looked out of his eyes when, after a hesitant pause, he closed the door.

"I did not know that you were here." He spoke apologetically. "I have had nothing to eat since breakfast, and was foraging for grub." Then, ignoring her glance at the shelves, where bread and meat and lumberman's cake stood, a serried array, he added, "But since you are here I should like to say a word."

Without answering she rested one white hand on the edge of the tub and looked at him. Interpreting the tacit assent, he went on:

"First of all, I want to draw your attention to the fact that it was not my fault that you got yourself lost on the trail. Second, that in bringing you here I was following the same dictates of humanity and good sense that would have animated me had you been a Cree squaw. Some people might say that you owed me a little gratitude, but I'll pass that and go on. You were a witness of what happened this morning, and you will admit that it was a narrow shave—so narrow that the difference of a second of time or a foot in space would have left you a widow and my father's heiress."

She opened her mouth to reply, but he anticipated the objection that trembled on her



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tongue. "No, he would not. Not only is the old dad possessed in full by the old rigid Presbyterian hatred for divorce, but he cherishes a great tenderness for you. In spite of our separation you stand—I was going to say *next* to me in his affection, but I might almost put it first, for he holds me altogether in blame. Had I been killed you would have inherited all that he owns."

"Well?" She filled in his pause.

"This being the case, seeing that you have taken no steps toward divorce, also that, besides owing me your own life, you stand to profit immensely by the loss of time, don't you think I might claim at your hands the ordinary civilities you accord to strangers?"

"Haven't I—been civil?"

"Not unless you call silence and complete avoidance civil. When it is necessary for me to address you it is not pleasant to have you reply to another."

"But do you wonder at it? Instead of sending me back to the Portage, so that I could return to Winnipeg by train, you brought me on here, where I am compelled to endure your presence. Also you refused to let me go—"

"Because it would have endangered your life—just as it would if I had been fool enough to send you back to the Portage. That was the hardest blizzard I ever saw. It was a toss-up at times whether we should ever gain the shelter of the

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woods. Out in the open we should all have perished."

"I would have been perfectly willing to take the chance—both then and to-day," she went on, commenting upon his previous statement. "If I have taken no steps toward divorce it is merely because I dreaded the scandal in the first place; in the second, our marriage is broken more completely, so far as I am concerned, than it could ever be by law. If you think that I would profit by your death you are again very much mistaken. I should refuse to inherit, or, if the law forced your father's property upon me, I would give it away"—her gray eyes turned pure black while her red lips pouted in scorn—"to a foundling asylum."

"That was hardly necessary." Reproach shadowed his tone, and had he let it go at that he would have been the gainer. She was already sorry for the sarcasm. Resentment leaped again in her eyes when he went on, "You know how bitterly I repented, and I have lived straight ever since."

"You have lived straight. Oh, have you? Well, so have I."

Standing there, erect, in bright-eyed rebellion, cheeks mantling with the clean blood of virginal youth, the assertion of personal purity seemed ridiculously superfluous. It was so astoundingly unnecessary that he could not repress an amused smile. "You? Why, you couldn't do anything else if you tried."

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He had better have left it unsaid, for her assertion was the protest of the woman against the dual standard to which he had unconsciously appealed, the social law that would have damned in her that which it would have excused in him. Instead of appeasing, his faith merely fed her anger.

"Oh, I couldn't?" She had taken her hand off the tub, and she seemed to swell and grow taller as the tide of her bitter reflections burst at last from its bounds. "It is merely your man's egotism makes you think so. In the last year I have had ample opportunity for thought, and some of my conclusions would have appeared wicked to my old self, the foolishly innocent self that I was till you destroyed my peace. Ever since the beginning of time your sex has dominated and denounced, preached and drummed it into mine, that none but a wicked woman could possibly feel, much less entertain, love for any other than her legal husband. But it's a lie! All women know, too, that it is a lie! They may and do hide the knowledge from each other, the weak souls may even stifle it in themselves, but in the secrecy of their own hearts they know right well that there is room in a woman's love for more than one love—sometimes for more than one at a time. They have been taught to suppress it. They do hide it for fear of the consequences that follow discovery. Nevertheless it is there. Many a husband who takes his wife's blameless

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chastity as a tribute to himself would be surprised if he could get a peep sometimes into her inner thought—I mean good wives, at that. Between what the world calls a good man and a good woman there's not one iota of difference. Both have had their temptations and were strong enough to surmount them—only from ages of practice under fear of punishment the woman does it as a matter of course and gets no credit for it. Or if there is any difference, it is in the quality rather than the quantity of their loves. Before a woman gives herself, love, real love that is woven into the fiber of her mother instinct, must first be roused. It is only man—and the beasts—that give themselves cold."

She had swept on to the scornful conclusion. While he stood, too astonished to frame an answer, she continued: "So do not deceive yourself. Into the life of every woman some man comes at some time to stir as deep or deeper feeling than that which she has for her husband. She conceals it from him, sometimes from herself. Nevertheless, it is there. Like all young girls, I was fitted out with the usual set of chalk-and-china-white ideals, but they are not made to wear. With some they last longer than others, may even outwear a few insipid natures. Mine were smashed at one blow, and since then I have had time to think and find out for myself the real nature of things. So do not feel too sure of me. When the man comes who can stir me—

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why shouldn't I follow your excellent example?"

He was standing, as aforesaid, stricken silent by the outburst, too utterly astonished for speech. At all times she was pretty. Now her flashing emotion, the brilliance of her anger, raised her comeliness to a high order of beauty. He felt it keenly, too, the more keenly because his past idealization of her had excluded sex from his love. And he responded with a primal impulse that urged to seize and tame her, crush at once her body and will. It registered itself, that furious impulse, in the purpose that leaped like an animal from ambush into his strong, square face. The next instant he controlled it. But so powerful it was, so plainly revealed, that she stepped back, and was not astonished by his quick reassurance:

"I'm not going to. Don't be afraid."

"You had better not." Her answer, too, conveyed full knowledge.

"Why shouldn't you follow my example?" Recovering, he returned to her question. After a pause, he restored with reverent fingers the roseate veils she had rudely torn away, with a reply formed by the idealism that blinds the sons of men whenever they contemplate the nature of woman. "Simply because you could not. The very supposition is ridiculous. But we have wandered from the subject. Returning—don't you think that I have earned ordinarily civil treatment at your hands?"

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"Certainly." She conceded it at once. "If I have been rude I am sorry."

"Thank you."

Turning, he helped himself to bread and meat from the shelf, was making again toward the door when she called after him, "Don't let me drive you out in the cold."

Content, however, with even so slight a concession, he did not care to jeopardize it. "Thanks, but there's a fine fire in the office. I shall eat there."

While walking across to the office, he released a smile that he had held in ambush for fear of affording further offense. "Follow my example. It's funny," he added, with a slight sigh—"or would be if the consequences weren't so damned tragic."

The idea would have appeared even less humorous could he have obtained just then a glimpse into her thought: "Could I?" She asked it of herself, while slowly wringing out a skirt. Her eyes glowed dangerously above a ripple of mischief when she answered: "One never knows till—one is tried. Perhaps—under the proper provocation."

## CHAPTER VII

**W**ERE some immortal being to revisit the earth in cycles of a thousand years he would find one thing unchanged. While races come and go, dynasties and civilizations disappear, customs and manners change, the familiar sight of men sitting around a fire when darkness falls over the earth still remains.

In the camp office that night, said immortal would have felt very much at home. The wide chimney and hearth—built after the Cree fashion, of mud plastered upon a green willow woven frame—the dark log walls chinked with clay and moss, heavy sod roof laid on poplar poles, might have belonged to the house of some Saxon thane in dark English woods. The shelves for the goods, supported by pegs driven into the logs, the wooden hinges and sneck on the door, floor of frozen earth, all belonged to that old age.

Of the four sitting around the fire, the giant foreman, with his viking head, Ferrier, and the clerk in moose-skins and moccasins, properly belonged in the picture. Gabrielle alone was alien to it—not so much in her dress, for the fur cloak she was wearing over her shoulders in lieu of a



SHE WAS REALLY WONDERFUL, SITTING THERE BY A LUMBERMAN'S FIRE,  
LOCKED BY DEEP SNOWS IN THE HEART OF CONTINENTAL WOODS





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shawl made a presentable imitation of the wolf-skin robe of a Saxon maid—but in the face, the quivering sensitiveness, the lively intelligence of it, which had required ages to develop from the soft animality of primitive woman.

Viewed under the illuminations of history, she was really wonderful, sitting there by a lumberman's fire, locked by deep snows in the heart of continental woods. Through her, a daughter of modernity, crown and flower of the evolutionary process, was expressed in clear thought the dim desire and feeling of generations of women dead and gone. For the lights that lifted and lowered in her gray eyes were produced by feeling that was born with Eve in the Garden of Eden. Their sparkle, when her glance happened to touch Ferrier, expressed resentment at the immemorial wrongs of her sex.

Unconscious on his part that he was being made into a target for the slings and arrows of all time, Ferrier smoked his evening pipe with placidity born of his content at certain small civilities Gabrielle had accorded him at supper. Though it was by no means obtrusive, this quiet satisfaction of his was just then the worst of misdeameanors, and it was aggravated by the soft, almost shy reverence of his occasional glances. The more vividly because of their perfect unconsciousness, they reaffirmed the stained-glass-angel point of view toward her sex he had expressed that afternoon, than which nothing

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can be more irritating to a healthy-minded human woman. By no means the first or last wife in domestic history, she blazed inwardly, and longed with an intense longing to do something that would shock him out of his assurance.

"We are to be marble till you breathe into us the breath of life?" her thought ran. "Then lapse again to stone at your pleasure? Body and soul we are to be bound up in you? From the cradle we are ordained to be your single creature, and not even in thought must our glances stray? And to think! But for Susanne I should probably have gone on believing it."

Leaping under fresh fuel thrown on by the clerk, the fire lent a ruddy tinge to the mutiny that flashed up in her eyes. From Ferrier her glance went to the clerk, and while she quietly watched him the mutiny became spiced with mischief. "Won't you please tell me more about London?" she asked.

The clerk looked dubiously at the foreman and Ferrier. "I was afraid that I had bored you to death this morning, and they—might not be interested."

The foreman, who was cutting down a second pair of moccasins to Gabrielle's size, looked up. "Go ahead, sonny, I'd like it."

"Sure!" Ferrier's assent, however, was qualified by a shrug. "I can stand it."

"You see?" But though he demurred it required only a little skilful questioning on Ga-

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brielle's part to get him started, and, once going, he poured, mixing description of the theaters, shows, parks, and shops with anecdotes of celebrities that were really entertaining. More than once the foreman's deep laugh rumbled across the hearth, and after a while Ferrier threw in an occasional remark. The clerk would undoubtedly have arrived at an honorable conclusion if he had not tacked a reflection upon the colonies on to a panegyric that set forth the glories of old England.

"Over there"—he sighed—"one lives. Here one merely subsists."

"Not always," Ferrier dryly commented. "I've seen a good many of your countrymen that didn't."

It fell like a dash of water on the clerk's heat. But if he winced he still retorted with spirit: "Exactly, my dear fellow, but I doubt whether some of you lumbermen would do any better if you had to fish for a living in London. If we find it hard to get along here, that is because we were not trained for it."

"What *were* you trained for?"

It was a hard question, but the clerk met it with a frank concession. "Nothing. But I wasn't talking of remittance men. Granted that we are a lot of useless beggars, we are not England. Barring us out, you'll have to admit that in all that really counts—trade, shipping, wealth, political prestige—she stands at the head of the world."

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"But I don't."

"You don't?" Templeton's brows rose at the heresy. "But, man, look at her glorious history—"

"That's of the past; come to the present. Who've you licked in the last thirty years? A few Afghans and demoralized Egyptians. You bet machine-guns and long-range rifles against clubs and spears, and then don't always win. Why, a Zulu tribe without a gun to its name wiped out one of your crack regiments not so very long ago."

He paused to enjoy the clerk's horror. In India a certain young Mr. Kipling had just appointed himself "Drum Major of Imperialism," and was strenuously beating the "tattoo that follows the sun around the world." His "Recessional," with its note of prophecy that would find fulfilment in the Boer War, was yet unsounded. For a colonial to attempt to match countries with the "Empire" transcended presumption, rose almost to sacrilege. But on the two occasions Ferrier had visited England with his father, he had seen and judged for himself. Now he went on to set forth the very conclusions that Kipling would be driven to accept in a very few years.

"I've seen a little of your country myself—enough to judge of the misery and squalor, hunger, frightful poverty, that form a rotten foundation for its superficial pomp and power. No,

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I'm not going altogether on your slums." He denied the clerk's interruption. "I've seen also your half-starved country bumpkins and the puny, undersized peoples of your manufacturing towns, and just as surely as a stream cannot rise any higher than its source so a nation cannot rise far above the general average of its people. If you doubt what I am saying consider the physical standard required for enlistment in your army. Five feet three inches in height, thirty-two and a half inches chest girth—a measurement that can be filled out by the average thirteen-year-old boy in any Canadian school—and even at that you can't get men enough to fill up your regiments of the line. If ever you get into a real war—with Germany, for instance—you'll be whipped out of your boots."

While she listened, Gabrielle's colors had gradually kindled, and now she rushed to the clerk's defense. "Size is no measure of courage, nor bulk necessary for straight shooting."

"The bigger the man, the easier he's shot." The foreman backed her up, as always. "See what a mark I'd make."

But the clerk hardly required the encouragement. With the upper-class Englishman's hereditary scorn for the lower orders, he waved away Ferrier's argument. "The army? The off-scourings of the nation, fit only to be food for powder. The sooner it is blown off the face of the earth the better for the nation. After

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that you'll see the real men step into the breach."

"Yet it *is* your army," Ferrier pressed him. "The first line of defense between you and the German. After it is gone your volunteers will be easy money." With a little more gentleness he turned to answer Gabrielle. "Littleness does measure courage when it is the product of starvation. You can't enfeeble the body without sapping the spirit, and that is exactly the condition of the masses of England. And the middle classes are not much better. In all the world there is nothing so utterly servile as your English shopkeeper. He'll put a permanent crick in his back to sell you six pennorth, and take a kick with a farthing's profit. What I hold is this—all the worth of England has been drained into her colonies years ago, and there is nothing left but a hollow-sounding shell to murmur of past greatness. In all that is really worth while—strength, courage, natural ability, sterling independence—she is away behind us."

"All physical qualities—or closely associated with them." The clerk returned to the charge. "I'll admit that in those you do outclass us; but after all it is mind that rules. Where are your statesmen, your writers and artists, your singers, poets?"

"Everything in its season. We have not ripened sufficiently for that. A touch of rottenness seems to be necessary for their production,

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and we shall come to it soon enough." Resuming his pipe, he fired a last shot: "I'll admit, on my side, that we could use a few. I wish they'd mix in a selection with the next remittance batch."

This was not the end. With the inability to comprehend defeat which Napoleon observed and cursed in the English at Waterloo the clerk returned to his guns, pouring in broadsides of facts, figures, historical citations, in reply to Ferrier's curt sarcasms. In fact, the wordy war continued till the foreman brought a pause by ordering a "try-on" of the new moccasins. When Gabrielle thrust forth her foot for inspection, hostilities were suspended, while all three admired both the glovelike fit and few inches of shapely ankle that escaped the jealous guard of her skirt. Before they could fall to again, the foreman stretched his great limbs with a yawn.

"Bedtime for young ladies," he growled, with pretended ferocity. "You fellows can finish to-morrow."

"Won't be necessary." Ferrier grinned. "There's nothing left of old England."

Even if his cause had been lost, the clerk was still a gainer, for as he moved toward the door Gabrielle called after him, "Never mind, Mr. Templeton, I believe all that you said." And deeper consequences were to follow. Whereas, until that morning the clerk had been no more in her sight than any other cog in the camp machin-



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ery, the cause they had made together against Ferrier established between them a connecting link, one that was greatly strengthened when, on her return from breakfast next morning, he handed her a couple of books.

"Keats and Rossetti," he explained, half apologetically. "I'm rather fond of them myself, and I stuck them in my bag when I came up here. I thought you might like to look them over."

They were really a godsend, for she loved poetry, and after Ferrier and the foreman had gone to the woods she coiled up on a pile of furs in a snug corner by the fireplace and fell at once to reading, while the clerk, taking advantage of her preoccupation, studied her at his leisure.

Neither was the study altogether one-sided. In response to the verses which she sometimes read aloud the clerk's face would light up while his eyes softened and enlarged till they were almost feminine. When he moved from his rough desk to the shelves to serve the smith with tobacco his rough heavy moleskins could not altogether smother the slender grace of his figure.

"He will make some girl a nice lover," was her inward comment, but in passing it, she did not realize that she had unconsciously pronounced him desirable for herself; that, in the language of the Scriptures, "he had found favor in her sight." Not being conscious of it, she pursued her investigations along other lines, through

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criticism and comment on her reading, and discovered that, like most upper-class Englishmen, he possessed the wide reading and culture which in the Western world is a monopoly almost feminine. Yet all these communings and observations proceeded without actual thought, so naturally that she never realized how quickly they were moving toward intimacy till just before noon she heard Ferrier's voice outside. If she had expected to provoke his jealousy she was doomed to utter disappointment, for he addressed her with quiet indifference.

"If you care to walk this afternoon Templeton can go with you."

It was assuredly provoking, and lacking, just then, means of retaliation, she visited her secret wrath upon the clerk, whose quick smile betrayed his hope. "Thanks, but Mr. Nelson promised to take me down to the river some time. I heard him say last night that he might go there to-day."

She could have bitten off her tongue the next minute when he answered: "Something else turned up. I am going, instead. If you would like a drive I'll hitch the ponies."

She ached to say no, but, while it trembled upon her tongue, she remembered his question of yesterday: "Don't you think that I have earned ordinary civility at your hands?" Obeying a contrary impulse, she accepted—and went.

During dinner and while, later, she was putting

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on her things she chided herself for accepting. But it was done, and she disdained the usual feminine excuse—a headache. When she stepped into the sleigh beside him the high color and gay sparkle that showed between her fur collar and cap made a passable imitation of pleasurable excitement. They were, however, produced by rank rebellion at the thought of being tucked in with him for a whole afternoon.

For some little time after they started she fumed and fretted. Had he made any attempts at conversation just then it would surely have precipitated an explosion. She would have jumped at a chance to turn back. But a happy intuition kept him silent till the merry clash of sleigh-bells, smooth, swift motion through dark woods, white lakes, still glades, had worked their soothing effect. When at last he did speak it was in a quiet vein, wherein interesting bits of information alternated with humorous comments on incidents connected with his work. So interesting, indeed, did he make it that a full hour slipped away before she realized with a start that she was enjoying herself.

Consciousness of it, of course, revived her vexation. She sternly refused thenceforth to be either amused or edified. Nevertheless, she found it quite difficult to fan the coals of her anger, and when finally he reined in on the banks of the river she forgot all about herself in sudden awe at the magnitude of his work,

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Between the snow-clad banks some three million cubic feet of lumber in the log lay in waiting for the spring floods that would carry it on down to Lake Manitoba, across which it would be rafted down to the mills. She had heard before leaving home that Ferrier had been "staked" by his father to conduct some lumbering enterprise in the Northwest on his own account. In one of many little talks the foreman had told her of the rapidly growing market for lumber products in the "Territories"; with almost any old kind of luck Ferrier stood to make a small fortune on this single venture. But, though she had not doubted, "seeing is believing." The huge black piles that filled the river-bank high for half a mile of its length compelled respect that she would never have accorded to mere words. Looming in a light flurry of snow, their black bulk drove in some idea of the forethought and figuring, not to mention the preparatory work entailed by the building of a camp in the heart of the woods seventy miles from the railroad, or the immense amount of teaming required to provision it with hay and grain for sixty horses and almost twice as many men.

Looking down on it all, she found it quite easy to accept the foreman's prophecy: "He'll be a bigger man than his father, for, look you, he not only begins where the old man leaves off, but the times offer larger opportunities. This Northwest is going to be covered in a few years

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with millions of farm-houses and thousands of towns. He will supply the lumber to build them. Some day he'll be king of the Canadian woods."

Also, she found herself sharing the respect which the three "unloaders" accorded his terse directions for the "dumping" of the next day's loads—wherein she followed the natural feminine instinct to admire power, whether of mind or muscle, which has guided the woman's choice of a mate throughout the ages. Going home, too, she came under the influence of another feeling, one so subtle, intangible, and which gained upon her so gradually that she did not divine its real nature till they had almost arrived at the camp.

Both coming and going they had passed individual teamsters, and twice Ferrier had reined in to give a direction to gangs at work. But, whereas she had shrunk from the fire of glances while under the clerk's escort, now she did not mind them. And it was not because they were less frequent or intense. It would have been unnatural if a man of them had neglected his chance. But in place of the fear and timidity, the burning shame of yesterday, she found herself returning the stares with frigid indifference. Unconsciously she was giving full play to the feminine instinct for protection. Her scornful assurance would have fitted just as easily the woman of a caveman, who felt herself perfectly safe from attack by less powerful members of

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the tribe. She had, as aforesaid, been in placid enjoyment of the feeling for a long time before she awoke to knowledge of its nature. Then, startled, she blushed and burned as she realized that, however much she tried to hate him, she still felt perfectly safe in his presence.

It was a humiliating discovery. The sting of it burned like a frost-bite, lent ice to her thanks when he dropped her at the office. His courteous answer, "The pleasure was mine," merely aggravated his offense, for, try hard as he might and did to conceal it, his expression still betrayed his hope that the afternoon had brought them a little nearer.

"He thinks it a step toward reconciliation," she told herself. "Well, I'll show him."

It was this idea that instigated her attempt to revive last night's argument as they sat around the office fire that evening. But this time Ferrier balked, would have none of it. So far as he was concerned the subject was talked out. While with care and craft she drew the clerk on to converse of his beloved England Ferrier puffed quietly at his pipe. The only time he spoke was to pass some remark concerning the morrow's work to the foreman. Finally, noticing a volume of Tennyson face downward on the table, where she had laid it, he picked it up and began to read.

"A pose!" she scornfully pronounced it.

But when half an hour later she saw that his pipe had gone out she felt less sure. He was

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still reading when she retired, and both while she was undressing and after she lay in bed the "chit! chit!" of turning leaves floated over the top of the partition.

The thought, "I never knew that he liked poetry," testified to her change of opinion concerning the pose. She was now quite sleepy—indeed, gently dozing—wherefore her animosity was not sufficiently alive to cause her alarm at the gentle pleasure she took in the thought. Adding itself to her new-born respect for his achievements, it made powerfully in his favor. In her dreamy state the past had almost vanished, and in another moment she would have slipped away with him into real dreamland. But just as she hesitated on the border the face of Susanne was projected into her vision, and she sat up, wide awake.

After that the rustle of the leaves became an additional aggravation. Withal, they continued to space the crackle of the fire, the sough of the wind in the chimney, till a voice of bells floated in from outside. So interested was he in his reading that they had risen to a clash before he closed the book. Followed the creak of the door, and, with the sudden stoppage of the bells, Red Dominique's voice drifted in on a blast of cold air:

"It ees of no use, Boss. On snow-shoes one might do it, but horses—nevaire!"

A bunk now creaked under the force of the

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foreman's leap, and she caught the heavy thud of his stockinged feet as he landed and ran to the door. Ensued a rumble of conversation, then the bells clashed out again as Dominique drove on to the stables. Returning inside, Ferrier and the foreman talked for a while in whispers. Though she could not hear, a certain tense gravity in the tones caused her a feeling of indefinite apprehension. Presently their voices rose, and she caught in conclusion two sentences that were destined to be fixed in her mind by following events:

“It is getting serious.”

“Yes; we'll have to warn the cook to economize to the limit, and if the storms don't let up the men will have to be put on rations.”



## CHAPTER VIII

**I**T was an unusual winter. All over the vast white face of the Northland the great spread of the Dakotas, Manitoba, Keewatin, Alberta, the incessant sweep of the snows mocked the puny, antlike operations of man. For days trains would be "stalled" on both the Canadian and American trunk-lines, and when freed by powerful snow-plows would crawl on a few miles, to be snowed up again. For weeks a thousand towns and villages were cut off from all communication with the outside world.

By certain erudite scientists the severity of the winter was ascribed to malignant "sun-spots." But coming a little closer home, its cause might be found in the excessive heat of an antipodean summer. The steaming vapors raised by a torrid sun from equatorial seas were herded northward by persistent south winds, to be condensed, and fall, in the snows that cut the camp off from the railroad. Or did the wind change and rush back in an icy draught to the equatorial oven, then it picked up the last loose snows, mixed and churned them in familiar fashion and hurled them southward in a great

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blank sheet. In either event, using the vivid slang of the day, they "got" Red Dominique "going or coming," but in spite of the failure of his two previous attempts he was to be seen hitching for a third try some days later.

When Dominique drove round to the office Ferrier was still inside, writing out an authorization for him to hire men and teams to bring in supplies. Though the camp had been provisioned in the beginning far beyond immediate needs, stocks of both meat and flour were running dangerously low. Yet, great as was Ferrier's anxiety over the situation, it did not stop him from noting an unusual phenomenon. Though Gabrielle had raised a small riot at each of Dominique's previous departures, this time she had not said a single word. Apparently uninterested, she bent over one of a dozen cheap novels which the foreman had gleaned for her from the camp.

The key to the contradiction was to be found in her remark to the clerk just before Ferrier came in: "It is no use to ask; they wouldn't let me go." Significantly she added, "But if Dominique does go through—"

"You don't mean to say that you would try and walk it?" the clerk had asked. To which she had quietly answered, "No, I won't *walk* it."

Unaware of this, Ferrier stole a glance at her over the top of his letter; at least he had intended to steal one, but, safeguarded by her

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absorption in her reading, the glance presently evolved into an appreciative stare. Whether it was due to the early hours, plentiful sleep, plain food, and general wholesome life of the camp, or to some obscure psychological cause, she had greatly improved in her looks. Her added color, the lustrous gray of her eyes, the rich gloss of her hair—these were the product of perfect health. Undoubtedly she had reached the perfection of her blooming.

Watching her, Ferrier trembled so that his pen shook off a blot on the paper, and the intensity of his longing for her vented itself in an inward cry, "Will she *never* forgive?" Perhaps through the very intensity of his feeling he had become of late strangely sensitive in her presence. Warned by some peculiar intuition that she was about to look up, he dropped his eyes back to his letter, signed and sealed it, then went out, and so missed the question that was written quite plainly upon her face:

"I wonder what he thinks."

Glancing around before she returned to her book, she met the gaze of the clerk, who, from the corner where he was rearranging some goods, had made equally good use of his eyes. Though he turned away instantly, she yet read again in their softness the secret she had divined for herself some days ago—the clerk was in love. She recognized it with a feeling of guilt, for since the evening they made common cause against

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Ferrier they had progressed gradually toward intimacy.

"It is all my fault," she now told herself. "If I had taken no notice of him it might never have happened. I suppose that I ought to tell him."

She had her marriage in mind, but the thought never passed into an intention, for in the moment of its conception she lulled doubt to rest with the specious plea: "Oh well, what if he does—like me? There can be no harm if I am careful."

In this she was not altogether sincere, for the statement entirely ignored certain danger signs in herself. It was perfectly natural for her to feel pleasure at the young fellow's admiration. But, consciously and unconsciously, his helplessness made a persistent and powerful appeal to the maternal instinct which is the foundation of every woman's love. When, as had happened many days ago, her small titillations of vanity became tangled with pity and genuine liking, she approached dangerously near to the border line of love.

Just how close she stood to it is shown by an incident that had occurred the previous evening. Coming back to the camp from a walk, their way had lain up a small hill, the face of which had been transformed by heavy sledding into a mask of ice. Heated by exercise, they had both removed their mittens, and when the clerk suddenly thrust out his hand to save her from slipping their palms joined in a firm, warm clasp.

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It was the match to powder, the wind to flame. Not daring to look at him, talking excitedly, she scrambled on to the top where, she thought, he would merely let go her hand. But he did not, and they walked on hand in hand till a sudden curve brought them into full view of three teamsters at one of the skids. One chanced to be the red-eyed ox-driver, and his stare helped to shock her back to herself. Having regained her control, she had taken care not to lose it again. But now in a milder degree, that intercepted glance had raised a second riot in her blood.

After Ferrier went out, the clerk returned to his desk, but did not write any more than she, a few feet away, read. With alarm that was curiously mingled with expectation she noted the absence of the pen's scratching. How long that silence endured she could never have said. Like church-bells at a distance, the merry clang of anvil and hammer came drifting over from the blacksmith's shop, punctuated at intervals with the groan of a passing sled. But all these were external, foreign to her pulsing, delicious feeling. A clap of thunder would have aroused her less than did the sudden stir of the clerk.

Through the single pane that now kept always clear of frost he had seen the foreman approaching, but in her ignorance of this her mind leaped to a dread possibility: "Oh, suppose he—speaks!"

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In sudden fright she jumped at the first means to head him off, and—landed out of the pan into the fire. "If you are not too busy I should like to go for a walk."

"Fine! I was only trying to kill time."

His alacrity convinced her of her mistake, and while putting on her wraps she condoned alarmed conscience with the specious plea: "If he does speak I shall tell him."

As she came out, muffled in her furs, the foreman entered, and just as Ferrier and the clerk had been stricken by her clear, vivid beauty, so he also stood looking down upon her, silent, contemplative. "Anything the matter with me?" She broke the spell with a saucy interrogation.

With the development of the paternal relation established at their first meeting had come a friendly license in speech. "Well, well!" His big laugh boomed through the place. "Of all the pretty girls that ever I saw—"

"Come, come!" she checked him. "I shall become a monster of vanity if I listen any longer to you and the cook."

"Yes, don't listen to the cook," he agreed, laughing. "He's a gay deceiver. Going for a walk? Well, see that Jack Frost doesn't steal any more kisses. It is pretty cold outside."

But under his cheerful acquiescence lay the doubt that shadowed his face while he watched them going down the trail. "They've been get-

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ting pretty thick of late." His thought explained the shadow. "It used to be that you could hear her chatter all over the camp, but there was never a mutter this morning during the whole hour I was in there with the smith. I thought at first she was just using him to rub the skin off the Boss. But that's always a dangerous game. It looks now as though she was liking him a bit for himself."

Shaking his head, he went out again after they had disappeared and walked over to the cook-house, where he found the cook just turning away from his own particular spy-hole in the frost of a window. Thrusting a huge ladle into a giant caldron of soup, the cook proceeded to stir thoughtfully while unbosoming himself upon the very subject of the other's reflections. Nodding toward the window he demanded: "Say! Phwativer is the Boss thinking av these days?"

Though he knew very well what was meant, the foreman affected ignorance. "Well, what *is* he thinking of?"

"Arrah, come off!" The cook called the little "bluff." "Ye well know phwat I'm m'aning. I'd like to give him just wan crack with the ladle for letting that remittance man cut him out wi' that girl."

"Mebbe the Boss don't want her!" Sure that something lay behind the other's wrath, the foreman drew him on.

"Then the more av a fool him! Pretty, eddi-

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cated, an' that sweet ye don't need sugar in the tay ye drink with her, she's the very bit the Lord Almighty carved out for a foine upstanding lad like him. If he can't see it may the devil take him!"

He fell to stirring the soup with such vigor that the foreman was now assured that something of importance had inspired his wrath. Again he led on, "You think she likes the clerk?"

"'Tis the talk av the camp. When a couple go marr-ehing with the two hands av them locked it doesn't take a prophet to say they're not hating."

"Hands locked?" Genuine surprise drew it out of the foreman.

The cook nodded. "They were seen last night be three av the min."

"And they are talking about it, heigh?"

"They are *so*." He rapped the spoon forcibly on the edge of the pot. "An' a damn sight too freely! That red-eyed divil of a teamster began it last night at the supper. 'If the Boss don't look out he's going to lose his fancy woman!' he bawls it out, free as that, with fifty av the min at the table."

The foreman swore. Red with anger, he was beginning, "And did you let—" when the cook stopped him.

"You bet I did not! 'Ye dirty gutter cat,' I answers him. 'Phwat kind av a name is that to put to a good girl? Ye're that soaked with the



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filth av the troughs ye've rolled in that it runs out av yer loose mouth!"

"I was hoping that he'd take it sober an' jump me. If he had I'd sure have split his gullet with the thin butcher over there on the board. But he only looks up at me, grinning, 'Don't she live with him in the office?'"

"'An' where would ye be afther having her live?' I shoots it back at him. 'In the bunk-houses with you pigs?' 'Twas yerself that was with him whin he picked her up on the trail, an' well ye know that there's been no chance to send her out since.'

"'Sure,' he sneers. 'Picked her up on a lumberman's trail that don't lead anywhere else but to this camp. Don't tell me! I've seen these office fancies before in the Michigan camps—some of 'em, too, that 'u'd stick hard by their man an' not go bunny-hugging with another behind his back.'

"'Another like that,' I tells him, 'an' I'll brain ye sure with the skillet!'"

"But he only laughs. 'Ah, go to hell; it don't pay to quarrel with the cook. The next thing I'd know you'd be putting ground glass in my beans.'

"I could sure have done it right thin. I was mad enough to have poisoned the dirty lot. But he didn't say anny more, an' I let it go at that. But now phwat do you think? It's got to be stopped. Would ye be advising me to tell the Boss?"

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"But, man," he answered the foreman's shake of the head, "I've seen horrible things come out av less. When I was cooking, fifteen years back, in the Wisconsin woods"—the incident he related reeked with the savage passion that wrought the death of five men—"the woman, she died, too. Av coorse she wasn't like this girl, but it isn't for them blind brutes to tell the difference. I'd feel a sight more comfortable if she was out av the camp. Now, a word slipped to the Boss—"

"Not on your life!" the foreman interrupted. "Look here, Miles, you have worked, off and on, about as long as I have for the Ferriers, and I know that you want to do the best you can by the Boss. Now—"

"Faix, an' I do that. 'Twas for—"

"Yes, yes; but wait. Because I know it I'm going to let you into a secret that doesn't belong to myself. You can't tell the Boss because—she's his wife."

Dropping the ladle into the soup, the cook stared, with eyes round as a capital "O" above his open mouth. "Ye don't say!" he gasped, at last. While the foreman went on giving an abbreviated account of Ferrier's story his expression gradually changed to awe and relief. "An' to think," he exclaimed, at the close, "if he'd happened in here ahead av you I'd sure have told him. Begor, but I kem mighty close to upsetting his soup. But say!" He added it

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after a moment of puzzled reflection. "We're her friends, you an' me, but ain't it a bit quare, her takin' after the clerk?"

"Then you believe what that fellow said?"

"There was three av thim that saw it—him an' her holding hands as they kem up from the little lake."

"I see." The foreman nodded. "It's steep there and covered with ice. He'd naturally offer to help her—not that I'm thinking she doesn't show him more favor than is wise. It's this way: At the bottom of her heart she still thinks a good deal of Ferrier, and it makes her so darned mad that she gets in and flirts a little out of self-defense."

"Then she's just using av him to spite the Boss?"

"At first." He went on to state in words his thought in the office. "But in the last week I've come to think that she's begun to like him a bit for himself."

A touch of shocked surprise leavened the interest in the cook's expression. He emitted a dubious cough. "But that ain't quite right—for a woman to be loving two av thim. It's agin' nature."

"Against nothing!" In spite of his deep concern, the foreman had to grin. "Do you mean to tell me, Miles, that you never loved two girls at once?"

"Be the same token, I did." With whimsical

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ruefulness the cook rubbed the bald spot on his head. "Here's the sign av it where the old woman grabbed me afther catching the pair av us at a bit av a kiss in the dark. There was no har-r-rm in it, only she wanted to be forehanded. There's not a fairy av them that could pull me away from the old woman—though I've seen some that I'd be running mighty hard from if they made up their minds to try. Shure, 'tis the way av a man to look afther a pretty girl, but women—they're different."

"That's where you and the Boss make the same mistake. To hear him tell of how she left him you'd swear she was a dried-up little saint. Between you and me, she's a darned sight better than that—a woman with all that goes into the makings, small vanities and tempers, love and passion, with jealousy enough to keep 'em sweet. The Boss has set her up on a pedestal high enough to make any girl dizzy to look down, and it will be altogether his own fault if she lets somebody else lift her off."

"Say!" The cook broke a silence of admiration. "You know a few things av yerself. 'Tis wonderful, an' you nivir even married."

The foreman's deep laugh rumbled through the cook-house. "It's only that you married chaps stand too close to the lamp. Of all the men in the world her husband's the last to get a look-in at a woman's soul. It's us fellows on the outside, that get the bad one's nods and winks, see

## CROSS TRAILS

the little looks and sighs that tell even the good ones are not always quite content."

The idea was just a little beyond the cook. He scratched his head during a puzzled pause, then: "So you think the bhoy's afther her?"

"I think he's in love—and he's not to be blamed, for he thinks she's a single woman. He ought to have been told in the beginning, for even though she turned him down it would be mighty awkward if he offered her love."

"'Twould so," the cook agreed. "This camp wouldn't be big enough for the two av thim." While he stimulated thought with a forefinger he added: "But for the life av me I can't see what she can see in him. To my thinking, he ain't too much av a man."

"Nor to mine, but we're not her."

His continuation evidenced once more that rare feeling and judgment which surprised Gabrielle whenever he spoke. "He can handle neither ax, saw, nor cant-hook, but that don't cut any figure. He's tall, good-looking, well set up, and carries himself with a superior sort of air that always fetches some women. Then, he's educated, nice-mannered, and talks like a book. On the outside there's no reason why she shouldn't take to him. Inside? We know nothing about that, for he hasn't been tried. But he's going to be, for I'm going to tell him right away." Rising to go out, he concluded: "If I'd known what you've told me I'd have done it before they went

## CROSS TRAILS

out. But I've got business in that direction, and I'll make it a point to keep them in sight."

"An'—supposing he keeps on—after he knows?" the cook called after him.

"Then it will be up to her—and the Boss."

## CHAPTER IX

**W**HILE the foreman and cook were thus philosophizing Gabrielle and the clerk proceeded upon their way. For the first time in many days the sun, from his low arc in the southern sky, had sent pale bands of light drifting through the forest. But for the snow reflections, it would yet have remained merely the ghost of a sunny day. Thrown up, however, from the face of that great white mirror, the light trebled, quintupled, created the illusion of a midsummer blaze. Adding to its cheer, the smith's anvil sent a trail of mellow tones to mix happily with the sharp staccato of distant axes, cries, cheerful curses, and kindred sounds of busy labor. Combined with the sharp tonic of the frosty air, nothing could have been so efficacious for the dissipation of sentimental miasmas. The first lungful sent the laggard blood from Gabrielle's brain flowing upon its rightful courses; she became once more mistress of herself.

Walking along, she repeated in thought the small lecture she had delivered to herself in the quiet of her bedroom last night: "Now, Gabrielle, take care. There you were again, making a fool

## CROSS TRAILS

of yourself. It isn't fair—to him. After this I will go out with Mr. Nelson, and I won't stay alone with"—she glanced covertly at the clerk—"him in the office. When no one else is there I shall go and talk to the cook."

In her pleasure over this stern resolution she felt quite justified in according him a little more attention, and it must be confessed that he was worthy of it. The Templeton walking there in the snowy woods was a very different Templeton from the dissipated young man who had been delivered per Allen line at Quebec a year and a half ago. Clean living and hard work had expunged from his exterior the outer evidence of a large crop of wild oats just sown in London. Unmarred by the tortions of youthful labor, he was good to look upon, in the prime of his young manhood.

Inside? Well, interiors always require more radical treatments, change only through experiences that wrack and wrench the system entire, before the tares are torn up by the roots. Inside, he was pretty much the same, a combination of impulses—good, bad, and indifferent; passions, appetites, all swayed by traits derived from a thousand ancestors. From his grave in Palestine, a crusader of Richard Cœur de Lion reached forth a dead hand to shape and mold him, battling with a frail beauty of Charles's court for possession of his soul. Very much in love, just now, he would have repelled the suggestion of evil



## CROSS TRAILS

with just indignation. He was presently to prove that he stood ready to die for his lady. But if he got wind of her married status and the affair passed the bounds of standardized love? It remained to be seen whether or not he could rise superior to inherited prejudices and training, consider it from any other than the second conventional viewpoint—as an illicit adventure.

The relief that followed Gabrielle's resolution also permitted her to take a livelier interest in the things about them. It lent animation to her cry "Oh, look!" when a flock of snowbirds flitted past like dandelion fluff under a breath of wind. She had barely finished exclaiming her wonder that such little things should be able to endure the bitter frosts, before, with a whirl of beating wings, a ptarmigan rose out of a fountain of snow almost at their feet. After she had curiously investigated its lair among the roots of a small red willow there next appeared a snow tracery of small-feet scratches that marked the passage of some rodent, perhaps a mink on the trail of the ptarmigan. Still later the tracks of a trotting fox claimed their attention. Then a deeper impression of padded paws amid bloody feathers told how a lynx had sprung from a bough upon his kill. To her, a city girl, it was all new, and while she studied and enthused, bankrupting the clerk's small store of woodcraft, time was afforded for the foreman to gain upon their trail.

They were reversing yesterday's tramp, and

## CROSS TRAILS

thus she did not take particular notice of the direction until, with its usual disconcerting abruptness, the trail suddenly emptied them into the clearing where the red-eyed teamster was at work with two of his fellows.

"Oh, I had forgotten!" She uttered a vexed exclamation. But, realizing how queer it would look to turn back, she held on past the men. "Oh, nothing!" she replied to the clerk's question in a whisper. "Only I have conceived such an intense dislike for that man."

"He—he hasn't dared to address you?" The very idea brought the choleric blood of the aristocratic Templetons in a rush to his cheeks. "If he has—"

"Oh no!" she headed him off. "Only he always looks at me as if"—"he owned me" was in her mind; she substituted a lame construction—"he stares so!"

It was unfortunate. Apart from his aristocratic ideas concerning the proper bearing of what his mother would have called "the lower classes" he was just at that period when even a cursory glance at the object of his love will cause the young male to growl and bristle. Looking quickly, he caught not only the man's stare, but also the wink and nod he threw to his companions. Not noticing that he had stopped, Gabrielle walked on till his sharp challenge rang out on the frosty air:

"Here, you! *You*, sir! What do you mean?"

## CROSS TRAILS

"Oh, go to hell!"

As the man returned harsh answer Gabrielle whirled and saw that the clerk was running back.

Then—crack! his fist landed squarely between the teamster's eyes. A shrewd blow, it caught him off balance, and after one ineffectual stagger he sprawled backward and lay for a moment staring up in blank surprise.

Had he been a bully of the London slums, the sharp lesson would probably have ended there. Inherited respect for the upper class would have combined with fear of the police to keep him quiet. But this was no "hooligan," deprived of natural courage by slow starvation, but a lumberman, brought up in the ferocious tradition of the Wisconsin and Michigan camps. His first quiescence was due to the momentary paralysis that might seize even a wolf if it were suddenly attacked by a peaceful lamb. When it passed — like that wolf, he came straight at the throat of his man.

It was, of course, a serious breach of ethics. For a thousand generations his species had meekly accepted the kicks and cuffs of the Templetons of the earth, with or without halfpence, and as the clerk staggered back and then went down under the furious assault his expression betrayed shocked surprise.

It lacked, however, the slightest taint of fear. Though the lumberman swarmed all over him—feet, hands, teeth, and nails, all going at once in



A SHREWD BLOW, IT CAUGHT HIM OFF BALANCE, AND AFTER ONE INEFFECTUAL  
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the ferocious Michigan style—the clerk fought back with tenacious courage that would have done credit to the ancestor who fought with Cœur de Lion. Having secured a two-handed grip on the fellow's throat, he hung on like a bulldog, in spite of thumps, worrying, clawings, kicks, hung on even after two thumbs slid into the corners of his eyes.

Then he became conscious of a flutter of skirts, and caught a flash of white hands tugging hard at the broad shoulders above, heard Gabrielle's voice in horrified pleadings. He tried to shout "Go away!" but every ounce of his energy was concentrated in his fingers; not an iota was left for speech. But despite her efforts, with deliberation that was devilish the thumbs continued to press. A pang of agony, torture excruciating, shot through his eyeballs. Then the pressure ceased at the same moment the throat was torn from his grasp.

Though he scrambled at once to his feet, streaming tears prevented him from seeing the teamster kicking like a child in mid-air at the full upward stretch of the foreman's great arms. But he did hear the thud with which he struck on the hard trail. The shock would have half killed a city man. But, tough as hickory, imbued with a panther's virility as well as its ferocity, the man was up again in a second. Madened by the taste of fight, he flew at the foreman as he had at the clerk. The latter's sight cleared

## CROSS TRAILS

sufficiently for him to see the fellow's guard beaten down by an arm heavy and rigid as an iron bar.

This time he could not come back. But while he lay senseless, spread-eagled over the hard snow, it seemed as though his companions might do so, for they advanced a few steps, each gripping an iron-shod cant-hook. They, however, were cold, unwhetted by fight. Hesitating, they stopped and stood, sullen glances flickering between the foreman and the senseless man at his feet.

White almost as the snow, Gabrielle also stared, surprised out of her first inclination to faint. For in place of her quiet, gentle friend there loomed a berserk Norseman, swelling, gigantic, with heavy brows lowering over eyes of molten steel. He was the viking reincarnate. It required no imagination to picture him on the prow of a pirate galley, beating sword and shield in time to his saga of battle. His voice, when he spoke, was singularly in apposition to his appearance. Yet its icy quiet was infinitely more deadly than a roaring challenge:

"Well? What's the matter? Why don't you come on?"

They were not so foolish. Throwing down his cant-hook, one of them spoke: "'Tain't none of our fight. Better let us 'tend to him, boss, before he freezes."

"Small loss if he did. I've a notion to take a cant-hook and finish the job."

## CROSS TRAILS

He looked quite capable of it, but just then Gabrielle's voice fell like a dash of water upon his hot anger:

"Oh, you are *sure* that you are not hurt? Oh, it was horrible! I felt—I thought—"

It was not so much the words as the tone that caused him to turn quickly. In that moment of horror Gabrielle of the caves had escaped the control of her civilized sister. She, the creature of feeling, knew right well the terms of the contest, as well as did her foresisters in the fierce fights of the caves. When he saw her stepping forward, handkerchief in hand, to wipe the clerk's streaming eyes the foreman felt that she was in imminent danger of bestowing the prize.

"She'd clean lost her holt on herself," he told that other good friend of hers, the cook, describing the affair an hour later. "Her voice? I wouldn't have had Ferrier hear it for all of old Vanderbilt's money, it was that soft and tender with love and pity. If he'd really lost an eye it was worth it."

"Let me see!" Just in time he stepped in between her and the clerk, and, though he saw at once that the eyes were not injured, he prolonged the examination to afford her time to regain control of herself. He heard her deep sigh when at last he spoke: "No harm done. He'd only just begun. A quart of hot water will put them all right. Come along back to the cook-house."



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"Oh, he's all right." He answered Gabrielle's scared glance at the senseless man. "Nothing less than a crowbar could put a dent in his thick skull." With a recurrence of the berserk gleam he added: "He'll get it some day, too. It's the usual finish of his kind."

Taking the clerk's arm in a rough but not unkindly grip, he led him off, talking while they walked, with the definite purpose of easing the strain till relations should become normal. "Tell me all about it," he asked, and after he had heard went on to give some rough but wholesome advice. "Yes, he's a bad lot. I'd fire him if there was any way to get him out. But remember, young fellow, the next time you fall out with any of these chaps don't look for a stand-up fight. If you've got to lick one of 'em pick up the nearest cant-hook and drive the point between his teeth. Sounds rough, but it's the only argument they understand."

All the time he was talking he managed to watch Gabrielle, who walked on his other hand, and while the soft admiration which presently replaced her first pallid despair was not altogether to his liking it was yet the more preferable of the two. By the time they reached the cook-house he saw with relief that she had regained her control; and, though she insisted on bathing the clerk's eyes herself, the service was after all the meed of his valor, duly earned.

"She's pulled herself together," he inwardly

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commented. Nevertheless, remembering her first look and tone, he did not leave anything to chance. The eyes duly bathed and comforted, he went straight to his duty as it appeared to him. When Templeton replied to his question that his sight was completely restored and the pain gone the foreman exclaimed: "That's fine, though I felt pretty sure he hadn't done you much harm. If you feel like resting, by all means take it. If not, I'd like to have you write out a list of smith's stores."

"Oh, I'm all right," the clerk assured him, and after thanking Gabrielle he followed at once out-doors.

Instead of going to the smith, however, the foreman led the way to an empty bunk-house. "Never mind the list," he replied to the clerk's glance of interrogation. "I brought you here where we could be alone for a little talk. It is on rather a delicate matter, but I believe you'll take it all right."

Seating himself on a bench by the cold stove, he waited till the other settled on the opposite side, then began, "Looks like you've taken a fancy to that girl."

His tone was apologetic, his manner kindly, but neither served to ward off the clerk's quick frown of offense. It proved that the hard knocks, disillusionments of his colonial career, had left his caste egotism untouched. His manner, replying, might have belonged to the

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first Sir Richard Templeton rebuking a peon on his estate.

"Really, my dear fellow, I don't see that it is any of your business."

"I'm not your dear fellow."

A touch of the berserk rekindled in the foreman's eyes. But it died as quickly, and he went on in steady, even tones: "I'm sorry that you take it that way; but, since you do, let me tell you that it is far better that I should handle it than the person to whom it rightfully belongs. There's one or two things you have got to be told, and I'll begin by saying that, while I'm not denying you played a gentleman's hand out there just now, I do question your wisdom. In a place like this, where folks have to live close, can't get away from each other, it is sometimes wise not to look too closely. If that fellow had deliberately insulted the young lady I shouldn't have blamed you for striking. But a nod and a grin that she didn't see wasn't going to do her much harm. Anyway, if protection was needed it would have been better to leave it to her husband."

"Her *husband*?"

"That's what I said." In his natural resentment he found it hard to suppress a certain satisfaction at the clerk's look of dismay. "She is the Boss's wife."

"Ferrier's—*wife*? But—why—they hardly speak—are scarcely civil to each other!"

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The feeling behind his pained stammerings softened the other. "If civility was proof of marriage there'd be mighty few that would stand. They separated after a scrap. Now, look here," he continued, with his usual kind good nature; "this is their secret, and I am only telling it to prevent you from making trouble for her and yourself. Excepting you and the cook there's no one else knows it in all the camp. She isn't aware, either, that we know it, and it will now be up to you to see she doesn't find out."

"Of course, of course!" By a manifestly painful effort the clerk mastered his dismay. "You can depend on me."

"That's the talk." Placated by his ready assent, the foreman gave his natural kindness full sway. Moved by the utter misery of the other's face, he attempted a little comfort. "I know it is rough on you. Yet—"

But again the Templeton pride rose in revolt. Uttering a chilly, "Thank you, but please keep your sympathy till I ask for it," he rose and walked out.

Following to the door, the foreman watched him striding, head bent, toward the office. A shake of the head evidenced his own doubt. But presently his expression of cheerless disgust lightened. He even indulged in a small grin that accompanied the thought, "Well, that ought to hold you for a little while."

Inside the office the clerk sat at his desk,

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plunged in moody meditation. Almost an hour passed before he moved. But when he did his sudden chirking up and the conceited way in which he fell to twisting the ends of his blond mustache would not have increased the foreman's optimism over the situation had he been there to see.

## CHAPTER X

**I**N an attempt to impress the literati of his time, Solomon, the Wise, wrote the following: "Strange is the way of a man with a maid."

He would have done better, however, had he reversed the terms of the equation, for by contrast with the way of a maid, that of a man is like unto a level path through a sunlit land. Returning from maids in general to Gabrielle in particular, her path during the next few days exhibited so many advances, retreats, swift doublings, stops, and turnings, that the sympathetic visions of her friends, the cook and foreman, were hopelessly strained in the attempt to follow its ramifications.

In the morning she always took coffee and toast with the cook several hours after the camp, including the "office," had finished breakfast and gone about its daily tasks. After a lively chat she then usually watched the smith pounding white-hot iron into mighty thews and sinews for Nelson's huge sleds, until the sharp frost drove her back to the office. Through his spy-hole in the frozen pane above his baking-board, the cook saw her standing in the doorway of the

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smithly next morning. Templeton was going out on some errand to the forest, and, unseen by him, she gazed after him with a certain modest wistfulness that was more eloquently revealing than the most shameless stare of abandoned love. It could not be better expressed than in the words the cook used when describing it later to the foreman.

"She reminded me powerful of a pretty deer that's just caught the whistle av its mate in the forest. Listening with all av its ears, soft eyes glowing, an' it all a tippy-toe ready to go the next jump."

And yet both at lunch and dinner that evening her manner and speech toward the clerk bordered on coldness. "Was she only fooling?" Observing her through a cloud of tobacco-smoke as they all sat by the office fire, Nelson asked it of himself. When a vivid recollection of her concern the preceding day rose in denial, he adopted the only alternative: "She's hedging—plumb afraid of herself."

The idea did not afford him unmitigated satisfaction, for it was contrary to the strength, virility of purpose, generous passions with which he had credited her in his thought. His conclusion, "I'd allowed she was the kind that take the bit in their teeth when they see what they want," carried almost a flavor of disappointment, though he chided himself for it the next moment. "You damned idiot! Any one would

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think that you were hankering for her to make a fool of herself."

Knowledge of her real motive would have removed that slight dissatisfaction, for he had not erred in thinking her devoid of the cold selfishness required for safe steering in the blind rapids of passion. She was fully capable of "making a fool of herself."

In the frozen watches of the preceding night she had fought a fierce battle against herself. Her marriage, duty to its vows, law, religion, the world, had all come under inquisition that stripped away their surface and left them exposed for that which they were—man-made institutions that sadly interfered with the comfort of her flesh and spirit. In the darkness that other Gabrielle had crept out of her cave to wage unrelenting war for her own rights. In all of the long fight she had not given a single thought to the cost to herself. Whatever the world demanded in pay she would have rendered cheerfully enough, and the victory had hung in the balance till the spirit cleverly turned the flanks of the flesh.

"He is in love with you." She frankly admitted the contention of the flesh. "And you—like him well enough. But supposing that you encouraged him? What could you give him beyond shame and disgrace? If you won't think of yourself, at least have a little consideration for him." Whereupon, spanked but unconvinced,



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the other Gabrielle had retired in dudgeon to her caves.

In all of her reflections Ferrier was almost ignored. "I owe him nothing." She had dismissed him with a phrase. "If it were only he—" No, her concern was all for the clerk, and if her idealization of him differed widely from the real person in ambush behind an expression of injured melancholy on the opposite side of the hearth, that was her misfortune more than her fault.

And the difference had widened to an impassable gulf in the last twenty-four hours. Recovering with the ease possible only to a shallow nature, from the shock of the foreman's announcement, Templeton had swung in his tracks and now turned to the situation the only other face possible for his vitiated instinct and traits. While out of her deep pity she assumed an indifference she was by no means feeling, he was thrilling evilly to a repeated thought:

"She's married, *married*—yet she let me hold her hand. If I had known it then—and those confounded teamsters had been out of the way—"

Instead of exciting regret the thought of her marriage now tickled his vanity, lent piquancy to his imaginings. Her indifference, the same vanity caused him to read as disguise. Yet, while so reading it, with a weak man's selfishness he did his best to tear it away. His melancholy air, injured look, were all to that end. Any real dudgeon that he might have felt was altogether

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due to resentment that she was able to hide her feeling at all.

Unaware of this, Gabrielle accepted the spurious counterfeit as real feeling, and when, in weak anger at her continued indifference, he went off to bed a full hour before his usual time she sent after him the same look of modest wistfulness that had aroused the cook's pity that morning.

"You poor little thing!" The foreman, who noticed the look, muttered it beneath his breath. Then in the midst of his sympathy—in fact, while the door still quivered under the clerk's closing hand—she achieved one of the aforesaid doublings.

"Did I hear you say that you were going down to the river to-morrow?" she asked of Ferrier.

"Yes. Would you like to go?"

The joy that leaped up in his fine hazel eyes, flamed all over his eager face; almost defeated the obscure instinct that had instigated her question—almost, not quite, for after a pause she answered, "Yes." Moreover, she went, observed with widely different feelings by the clerk and cook from their respective spy-holes in the office and cook-house. The foreman himself tucked the robes snugly about her before Ferrier drove off. After sleeping a night on it he had gained further understanding, which he presently put into words for the cook.

"She's afraid of herself." He answered the

## CROSS TRAILS

latter's jubilant comment on this unexpected turn of affairs; nor did he quite agree with the sentiment that "she would come by no har-r-rm with the Boss."

"Not if he goes easy and lets her have her head. If he tries any rushing—" He shook his big head.

Ferrier, on his part, was not altogether unaware of the fact. From their repeated clashes he had learned that Gabrielle was neither to be led nor driven in any direction that did not suit her own will; and, starting out, he behaved accordingly, pitching his manner and conversation upon a pleasantly impersonal plane. And it brought results. Half sick and weary from her midnight strivings, the girl was in a mood to welcome anything that would lift her out of herself. His quiet talk brought a lull in her stormy thought. As the sled sped swiftly on she yielded more and more to a sense of peace. Somehow his clear-cut phrases, good common sense, restrung her loosened fibers. Unconsciously she absorbed his strength. Before they had progressed a mile she began to display real interest and presently contributed her fair share to the talk which ran the gamut of camp affairs. In fact, it was she who first detected something peculiar in the attitude of the "swamping" gang which had just begun work on a new cut of logs.

"They were not working when I first saw them through the trees," she said, when, after a glance

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over the work, Ferrier drove on. "They were all in one group talking till they heard our bells. And, see"—a backward glance had shown them at it again—"look how violently they are gesticulating. There must be something wrong."

"Just soldiering, I reckon," he returned careless answer. "They will do it now and then. Nelson will be out soon, and he'll speed them up."

Her uneasiness allayed, she yielded again to the sense of comfort. So far things had gone very well. From both their points of view—he who desired nothing more than to be with her, she who was obtaining needed rest—the drive was proving a success. The rapid motion, sharp bite of the frost, cheerful talk, all helped to dissipate mental vapors and restore her being to its usual healthy tone. If her miasmas had only blown away on the wind! Or if, after extracting them, he could have shaken them off his finger ends in the same fashion that old ladies of Celtic stock get rid of headaches! But when from sheer lassitude she presently relapsed into silence they promptly entered into him. He fell a prey to his own thoughts; became the thrall of wild, pulsing feeling.

Of all the glammers with which tasteful integuments can invest a woman there is none so appealing as that imparted by furs. Pretty at her worst, in furs Gabrielle was—not to be denied.

"She's mine!" The thought flamed in Ferrier's mind. "She's mine! Even if she did

## CROSS TRAILS

leave me we are still bound. By law and custom she is *mine!*"

He would have been less than human if the thought had not been followed by its natural consequent—a furious impulse to seize and take. He deserved credit for the strength that enabled him to govern the impulse all the way to the river and half-way home. But for the ptarmigan which burst out of the usual fountain of snow almost under the ponies' noses, he would probably have held out to the end. But when, shying off the high trail, the little beasts upset the sleigh, restraint was set at naught.

His first thought on seizing her even then was to ease her fall. But as his senses leaped to the feel of her, luxuriously soft in his arms, that primitive impulse sprang into full command. Without attempting to rise, oblivious of the ponies that were plunging through the deep snow with the overturned sleigh dragging behind, he tore the collar away from her face and went in search of her lips.

At first—and through his blind passion he felt dim astonishment—she lay on the white couch of the snow, placid, quiescent. For a few delirious moments he thought that she had submitted. Perhaps subconsciously she had. Wearied, as aforesaid, by two restless nights, she had relapsed during the last hour into a sort of coma in which her senses escaped the slackened guard of her rebel mind. Neither the past, present, nor

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future had any place in consciousness. Susanne, Ferrier, even Templeton, appeared as dim nebulosities in far-off space. Only her senses were awake; the senses in which, when left to themselves, Ferrier excited no repugnance; the senses that, on the contrary, had deliriously registered his kisses little more than a year ago; the senses that accepted them now till her mind awoke.

“Oh, you brute!”

Crying it, she struck wildly at his face. But instead of chilling, the blow merely inflamed him. Crushing her against him he tried to kiss her again, would have but for the look of vivid repulsion that flashed out through her horror and fright. Where blows failed, that remembered look won out. Rising, he helped her up, then stood, slowly dusting the snow off his fur coat.

“Oh! You — you—” Words failed. She stood, biting her lips, hands clenched inside her mittens, the angrier for the trick of her traitorous senses. If she could have wiped out the memory of that momentary submission, had been free to charge all to his outrageous brutality, she could have commanded the situation. From the pinnacles of her outraged pride she could have scathed him with her scorn. But now? He stood looking at her, eyes shining, tense, eager, face alive with understanding.

“You—are not even ashamed!” she made a

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lame finish, then turned from him, climbed back to the trail, and began to walk on.

Though he could not see her face, she managed to make her back convey a vivid impression of frozen dignity. But it was all on the surface. Underneath she was filled with palpitant dismay.

If he really were not repulsive, had still power to arouse in her physical liking, how was it possible that she could also lo—*like* the clerk? Under the illumination of her dismay and anger she obtained a flashing glimpse of an intimate personal revelation. Then, shutting the eyes of her mind tightly against it, she manufactured a ready excuse:

“Of course, he isn’t *exactly* repulsive, and I was so tired and fagged out, just as good as asleep.”

Whatever delusion she might be cherishing in regard to her real feeling, there was nothing false about her anger. She hated him, bitterly hated him, for his understanding. Walking ahead, she took out her handkerchief and washed her lips with snow. Every drop of her Latin blood lent tingling force to her mental affirmation: “He’ll live to repent it! I’ll make him sorry for this!”

Undoubtedly the nebulous intention that had been floating in her mind since Dominique’s departure, crystallized into a definite purpose there and then. “No, I won’t *walk* out,” she had answered the clerk at its birth. Now, walking along, her mind busied itself with plans to avoid that alternative. Providing, as it were, an

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escape-valve for surplus emotion, she was able to bring her anger under control. Whereas five minutes ago she would have sworn that no power on earth could persuade her to ride again with Ferrier, she offered no objection when, a quarter of a mile up the trail, they found the ponies straddled on each side of a young poplar-tree. The sleigh was none the worse, beyond a crack in the pole, which he bound with a halter rope.

"I'm not altogether stupid," she replied to his offer to walk and let her drive on alone. "I should look silly going in by myself. I can stand it—as far as the camp."

So they drove on in silence—that is, of words. A certain quiet exultance, repressed smile loudly proclaimed his thought: "Say what you will, the fact remains—you lay quiet as a little mouse in my arms."

Just as clearly her ominous calm conveyed her answer: "Wait! Oh, just *wait!*"

Apart from these silent communings nothing passed between them up to the moment he stopped the ponies in the clearing where they had passed the men.

"Why, is it only three o'clock?"

He sent a puzzled glance over the clearing. The logs that thrust sawn snouts and dark-brown bellies out of the snow lay thick among the stumps. "Work enough for three days here," he commented. "Where the dickens can they be? It is far too early for them to have gone in."



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But gone in they had; and, driving along through the silent forest, a premonition of the cause was gradually driven in upon him. Instead of the usual clip-clip of busy axes, ringing song of the saws, hum of labor, there came only the sough of the wind among the trees. Twice he had to turn out to pass loads that loomed huge and dark as houses above them on the trail, and there was no break in their equipment to warrant the phenomenon. Snow had begun to fall again in the last hour, and already a white powder lay over the green of the iced tracks. Before they obtained, down a long vista, a glimpse of men swarming all over the camp, Ferrier had arrived at the truth:

“They’ve quit—struck!”

As the sleigh came slipping out into the open the swarm gathered in groups and knots, and in the glances that clung and followed her in the old disconcerting fashion Gabrielle shivered with fear.

The office now lay only a few yards ahead. Just before they reached it Ferrier bent over and spoke in low tones: “I am sorry. God knows that I would not willingly do anything to deepen your prejudice.”

But her eyes went to the clerk who had just come to the door. “That would be impossible.” She threw it over one cold shoulder, then called to the clerk, who had turned to go back in: “Will you please help me out?”

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Still under the influence of the heavy sulks that had held him all morning, he hesitated. Then, thrilling to something significant in her smile, he stepped forward. While stepping out he thought that she pressed his hand, and when with sudden resolution he returned the pressure and she gave no sign of offense the blood flamed through his leaping pulses, his brain whirled. It did not steady until Ferrier had driven on to the stable and he stood watching her warm her small, cold hands at the fire.

"Ouch! They hurt!" She made a wry face when her fingers began to throb with the revival of circulation.

"Let me rub them?"

She held them out at once, and while he rubbed them, first one, then the other, her late anger, desire for revenge, reinforced natural liking. At first he chafed vigorously, but in correspondence with his own mounting feeling the motion dwindled down to a languid caress. By that time, however, she had fallen a prey once more to the vibrant, pulsing feeling that had glued her hand in his on the evening they climbed the hill. Though she had surrendered her hands of her own free will, with a distinct purpose in view, she found it impossible to withdraw them after both the purpose was achieved and her excuse had departed along with the pain. Even when his caressing hand swept her sleeve almost to the elbow she still stood. Languid and relaxed,

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figure slightly drooped, eyes softly glowing, a faint blush on her face, she offered no protest until, bending suddenly, he planted a kiss on the cool white flesh of her arm.

"Oh no!" Then she drew hastily back, hands folded behind her out of reach of his clutch. "No, no! They no longer hurt—and some one is coming."

It was only a striker straggling through the camp, but during the minute that elapsed before his footfall died she had time to take order with herself. When, eyes shining in the midst of his flushed face, Templeton made to advance she held up a protesting hand. "Do you wish to offend me?" When he halted she added: "That is right. I wasn't mistaken in thinking you my friend."

"*Friend?* I'm your sla—"

"Friend," she hastily interposed, "just my friend."

"But—"

"Not now." She headed off the avowal she read in his face. "Later I shall have something to tell you. Till then—"

"Till then—" His tremulous jubilation told that he read it as a promise. "Till then I'll be content with 'friend.' You can count on me for anything. Tell me, what can I do? You need help?"

"Surely I do." Smiling at his ready acquiescence, she went on: "You know that I

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neither came here nor remained of my own accord?"

"But I'm glad that you did."

"*Selfish!*" Her smile abstracted the sting. "You and Mr. Nelson have both been nice, just as considerate as could be, and the cook—is an old dear. Yet you must have realized how difficult my position here is—a single, solitary girl all by herself in a lumber-camp. The men—they stare so! And that man—the other day—"

"Yes, yes!" He nodded. "It is hard, and yet—could hardly be avoided. However much one feels like doing it, there is no way to stop it."

"Yes, I know," she conceded. "Is it true? Are they really on strike?"

"Yes. They claim that the food has been reduced below a working ration and refuse to go out till Dominique returns with the teams. It's hardly true. Though the beef has given out, they still receive a fair allowance of pork and beans. Not enough, perhaps, to satisfy a lumberjack's voracious appetite, but sufficient to work on. To tell you the truth, the food is only an excuse. As I told you once before, a lumberman will sooner fight than eat—by preference, with the Boss. Nelson has been making a few quiet inquiries, and finds that our red-eyed friend, Bartholomew, and his gang have been stirring up trouble ever since they came to the camp."

"That dreadful man!" She shuddered. "Then they will be in camp now all the time. Oh, that

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makes it worse than ever! I shall be mewed up indoors—won't dare to go out."

"It will only be till Dominique returns."

"Then you really believe that he got out to the railroad?" And when he replied in the affirmative she clapped her little hands. "If he can do it, so can I!" Eyes flashing, face aglow, she executed a little swaying dance. "Don't tell me that I can't. It has hardly snowed since he left, and the chances are all in favor of fair weather, after a month of storms. My mind has been made up for two weeks. Nothing can stop me—if you will only lend me your help."

He was so interested in the swayings of the graceful figure that he caught only the last phrase. "My help?"

"Oh, I have it all worked out." She slid back and forth again in her dance. "All that I need is for you to help me get away."

"By yourself?" He shook his head when she nodded. "Not on your life! If I help you it will be on condition that I go, too."

"But—"

In her excitement she had not heard the snow crunch under the foreman's heavy foot. She had no more than time to slip to the other side of the hearth before he entered. Templeton had moved with equal celerity back to his desk, and now she bridged an uncomfortable pause with a question fired at Nelson's head: "Is it true that the men have struck?"

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"True enough." He gravely nodded, replying to further questions which had been answered already by the clerk. "It is Bartholomew, that red-eyed teamster, and his gang. They are natural trouble-breeders. But don't you bother, miss." He looked down upon her from his great height. "Whatever happens, I'll take care of you."

Entering, his face had been set in rough sternness, but now its lines melted in tender kindness. Looking up into his eyes, sea-blue and gentle and honest, she was smitten with a sudden desire to tell him all, make a clean breast of her anger, pique, perplexities, contradictory likings. But it was merely an impulse which she would hardly have carried over into action even if Ferrier had not just then come in. It expended itself in grateful thanks.

"You have always been *so* kind."

Bestowing a gentle pat on her shoulder, he turned to answer Ferrier's question, "Well, what about it?"

And while they talked, canvassing the situation, viewing it from every possible angle, that wise impulse of hers completely died. Though no opportunity presented itself for further talk with Templeton that afternoon, she managed to whisper to him as they came back to the office from the evening meal:

"We'll go for a walk to-morrow."

## CHAPTER XI

**T** IRED out by two sleepless nights, plus the afternoon's emotion, Gabrielle retired early. Any expectations of sleep which she might have been cherishing were, however, doomed to be disappointed, for the strikers were celebrating their release from labor. Though she could not see the yellow squares of light gleaming brightly in the dark mass of the bunk-houses, neither could she escape the songs and catcalls, buzz of talk, punctuated by oaths of triumph or disgust, which marked the fluctuations of several poker games. Whenever their voices accidentally rose above the first guarded tones, odd sentences from the counsel that Ferrier was holding with Nelson, were interjected into the general noise.

"I told them they'd be taxed a dollar's board for every day they laid off," came Nelson's deep tones. "But they just grinned, and Bartholomew pipes up: 'Oh, I don't know. I reckon you'll be needing a few men for the spring drive.'"

"Bartholomew?" Ferrier inquired. "He's—"

"The chap you brought in. Best hand with oxen I ever saw, but meachin' and contrary as hell."

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Gabrielle wondered if he were about to speak of the fight. But he did not. Ferrier spoke again: "You are sure he's at the bottom of this?"

"The head of it. Big Hans, Ole, Legarde, Svenson, the fellow you pulled from under the 'fall,' and French Bill are with him; all of a muchness for deviltry, but lacking his brains. He's wicked. One of the boys was telling—" His lowered voice sank below the raucous chorus of a lumberman's chantey in the bunk-house next door. She heard no more till Ferrier spoke to the clerk.

"You can sleep here to-night. Go for your blankets, and while you are out pass the word to Miles to bring his, too."

In the silence that ensued, after the clerk passed out, Gabrielle felt that they were listening to make sure that she slept. "Then there *is* danger," she thought, and was convinced of it when, the next moment, Ferrier spoke:

"It won't do any harm to be prepared."

"You bet." The foreman gave heavy confirmation.

Had there been room for doubt, it would have been dispelled by Ferrier's next words: "I wish she were out of here—honestly I do. I was hoping at first for reconciliation, but she's very bitter. Once or twice it looked as though she were showing signs of relenting, but at the slightest advance she would freeze right up. And this



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afternoon—" Gabrielle burned, then cooled again. "Well, I made a fool of myself, fixed myself with her for fair."

She would have been inhuman not to have been touched by the regret, pain of his tone. Then, as invariably happened in her softer moments, the old tide of feeling, turbulent, unanalyzable, came welling up from below. "You surely have," her thought echoed his statement. Yet the next instant she found herself seized by emotion that was contrary as complex.

"I wish she had not come here at all. I was settling down to work, training myself to forget, and now—it is all to do over again."

Somehow she did not like that. Certain as she was that his case was hopelessly prejudiced, that she had put him forever out of her own life, she still wanted him to go on regretting, remembering. She strained her ears to Nelson's gentle remonstrance:

"Pshaw! Don't give up."

"I haven't yet; won't till I've got to the bottom of something that happened this afternoon." Gabrielle burned again, for she knew that he meant that moment of quiescence when she lay in his arms. Yes, she burned but—listened.

"After that, if it's a blind lead, I shall call quits and set her free. She's young, awfully pretty, can pick and choose from lots of good fellows. When we go down to Winnipeg in the spring I shall see a lawyer at once."

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She was now conscious of a curious stir of feeling that had its base in resentment and was decidedly unpleasant.

"I wouldn't go too fast." It was the foreman again. "Looks to me like she hasn't found herself yet. She's worth a long wait, and there's no knowing what may happen if you give her her own time."

"She's welcome to all of mine—from now till doomsday." The stir partially subsided, allayed by the depth of feeling that pulsed in his answer. "It is her good that I am thinking of—not my own. I only feel that if there *is* no chance of reconciliation, I don't want the flower of her life to be wasted in useless waiting. If—" He broke off as the door opened to admit the cook and clerk.

During the next quarter of an hour an occasional whisper rose above the rustle of bedding. She caught the cook's husky brogue: "I wouldn't be afther trusting none av thim, an' their hearts black as a dirty night. The little lady's got to be kept under guard."

Startled, she listened for more, but the whispers ceased. Oppressed with apprehension, the more terrible because of its indefiniteness, she lay training her ears to every sound, till a sudden whoop and train of following catcalls brought her sitting up in bed. Shivering with cold and fear, she sat staring into the darkness, which suddenly resolved itself into answering stares, ranks

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of faces, all set in the avid, animal regard which, beginning on the street of the Portage, had met and followed her everywhere. As never before she felt them, the little glances, plucking and touching, embracing, caressing, manifestations of a creative force before which she shrank, afraid. Her horror, needless to say, gave an enormous stimulus to the desire she had expressed to the clerk. When, after she was half frozen, she forced herself to lie down by a strong effort of will, she lay for a long time thinking out her plans. They were completed by the time sleep stilled the last noise in the camp.

Even then she did not sleep. Her plans thus settled, her mind returned to the scraps of conversation she had overheard, and as she mused upon them there awoke within her a great wonder at herself. "Whatever is the matter with you?" She asked it in her thought. "You *let* him kiss you—and liked it, even if you were half asleep. Yet when Mr. Templeton chafed your hands—" She shivered under a recurrence of the long, slow thrills. Bewildered, lost in a maze of contradictory feeling, she was driven by sheer desperation to the generalization which the world and the church invented for just such cases. .

"I suppose that it is dreadfully wicked. But wicked or not, I can't help it. And—I'm going."

## CHAPTER XII

**F**ROM deep sleep, following nervous exhaustion, Gabrielle was aroused again by voices to find it broad day.

"I was thinking, myself, that 'twas no manner av use to be getting breakfast at four." The cook was explaining his oversleep.

"No," came Ferrier's answer. "Eight is early enough, and you can move lunch on an hour."

"Sounds like Sunday," Nelson made rambling comment.

And surely it did. The catcalls, snatches of song, crunching of snow under the moccasins of early risers were all phenomena peculiar to the Sabbath. Though with slight variations the sounds were identically the same as those that had caused Gabrielle's last night's fears, daylight somehow robbed their terrors. While she was dressing, the rising sun transmuted her window-panes into squares of gleaming silver, a cheerful augur. When, after the men's breakfast, she walked with Nelson and Ferrier over to the cook-house, she felt stronger than ever the Sabbath calm that enveloped the camp.

After weeks of solidity the mercury had

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thawed long enough to register twenty-nine below, a genial temperature by contrast with previous cold. And there was no wind. The forest brooded in deathlike stillness. Everywhere the sun shone, by the steaming stable doors, in the lee of the hay-corrals, in front of the bunk-houses, where knots of men smoked and skylarked in their shirt-sleeves. They all seemed so happy that Gabrielle had begun to reproach herself for her fears when she happened to overhear the foreman's comment:

"They're good-tempered enough just now, and if Dominique turns up in good time they'll go right back to work. But if it comes on storming again and we have to cut again on the grub—"

His ominous pause and the covert stares of the few stragglers who had come to breakfast late revived and strengthened her resolution. In pursuance thereof she spoke to Templeton when, after the meal, they returned to the office. "Will you go with me for a walk?"

"Sure." Ferrier answered the clerk's inquiring look. "There isn't a thing to do."

"I wouldn't go too far," Nelson called after them as they went out. "Idle men are always liable to get into mischief, and a good many of them will be out in the woods." His meaning look added, "You remember the other day."

Neither the remark nor the look, however, revealed his real feeling. Filling his pipe, he smoked thoughtfully for a while, glancing between puffs

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at Ferrier, who was measuring off twist tobacco for two lumberjacks. Presently he rose. "Don't know but I'll take a stroll myself."

Outside, he stood still a moment, looking around. But the pair had slipped away by a footpath that led into the woods from behind the office, and were already out of sight. Changing his intention, he returned to the fire and his pipe. "Anyway, it wouldn't do any good," he ruminated. "Nobody can tell her. She's got to find him out." He added a little later, "She'll do it, too, sure as fate."

He might have been a little less optimistic could he have caught a glimpse just then of her face; have seen the flooding colors that were the joint product of excitement, pleasure, and hope. Chatting gaily while swinging along at Templeton's side, there was no hint of discovery in either her manner or look. Though she pulled quickly away when he reached for her hand as they passed out of sight, it was done very gently. There was no particle of anger in her reproof:

"I told you 'not yet.'"

"That implies sometime?" he begged.

She returned a smiling "Perhaps," adding in response to his persistence, "when we are on the outside."

To her that meant the Portage, Winnipeg, Montreal, some place where she should have time to think and feel truly, decide on their future relations. It was impossible for her to read his

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interpretation of it from the sudden blue glow of his eyes. If she had, it would undoubtedly have brought a pause into the bright detail of her plans.

"I had meant to do it all along, and last night I thought it all out to the end. The ponies, you know, are the fastest beasts in camp. With a fair start—"

"You propose to—steal them?"

"*Borrow* them," she corrected; "also the light sled. We'll leave them at the Portage."

"But—"

"Are you afraid?" Her eyes brightened with a touch of scorn.

"Not a bit." Neither was he. His hesitation was merely due to his impracticability, inability to grasp the idea from her hint. "But how—"

"Oh, that is easy." Her eyes softened again. "I shall plead a headache at supper to-night and go out in the middle of the meal. While you are all eating I shall get my furs, then go down to the stable and burrow into the hay in the empty stall at the end. They will think, of course, that I have gone to bed, and after they have gone to sleep you can slip out. Then it's easy as telling it; we'll hitch and slip quietly away."

"But the bells?" he criticized. "You know there's a double string on the ponies' harness!"

She stared her surprise. A daughter of the frontier herself, bred of a people in whom two

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centuries of struggle against stern forces had developed efficiency into an instinct, she could hardly understand such an amazing impracticability. But where a man would have been moved to scorn his inefficiency excited in her only soft laughter.

"Don't you think that we might take them off? When we return to the camp you must choose your time to slip into the stable and do it. Also take close note of where the sled stands, and after dark run it a few hundred yards down trail into the woods. We can hitch, then, in safety."

"Say, you are a wonder!" She had stopped to gaze at him. Moving on again, he gave full vent to his admiration. "I should never have thought of that." He proved it the next moment by another question: "But—can we follow the trail?"

"Dominique did."

"But he's Indian."

She shrugged a little impatiently. "We can follow his tracks."

"What if they are blown over?"

"Not likely. It takes a good many storms to completely wipe out a track, and when it is laid on top of a beaten trail you can always trace the outlines by the border of scrub and grass." Once more reversing their natural positions, she ran on, laying out her plan: "The trail will be almost good in the shelter of the forest to the first



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teaming hut at Fifteen Mile. We'll feed and take breakfast there, then go on to Thirty Mile for lunch. After a good rest and feed there the ponies ought to be able to make Forty-five Mile—where Mr. Ferrier picked me up, you know—before night. Next day, if the weather holds out, we'll make Norway's road-house. Then a morning's run will put us into the Portage."

"We'll require food."

She laughed lowly in amused triumph. "Mr. Ferrier has been kind enough to provide that."

"*Ferrier?* Why—"

"All of the teamsters' huts were stocked at the beginning of winter with rough provision."

"But supposing it has all been used?"

"It hasn't." She laughed merrily at his persistent objections. "I heard Mr. Nelson tell the cook yesterday that if Dominique did not return before the end of the week he would send down and bring in the food from the two nearest huts."

"Well, you *surely* are a wonder!"

Aware that only a tithe of his admiration was due to her sagacity, she colored a little and turned her head from his gaze. Feeling also the response in herself, she ran on covering her pleasant confusion with a mask of talk, planning everything in detail down to the furnishing of the sled with rugs and horse-blankets.

To him both her foresight and confidence were amazing, though it is to be feared that the lat-

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ter quality was born of her wide ignorance concerning the differences of winter travel on the uncharted prairies and the fenced roads of the Quebec townships. Whatever its origin, her confidence was supreme, did not require the stimulus that lay in wait around the next turn of the trail.

Always the unexpected presides over forest meetings. Though the clip of an ax, ring of a saw, tap of a wedge may give warning, the varying density of brush and trees prevents one from judging the distance, or one may stumble over a gang during a pause in their work. So beyond a low murmur of talk that was drowned by their own chatter they received no notice of the five men who were sitting on a log under the lee of a pile of brush.

Big Hans and Ole, Bartholomew, and his two mates. Templeton recognized them at a glance as the five leaders in the strike. Of them all Gabrielle knew only Bartholomew by sight. But, though coming suddenly on them, she instantly averted her eyes, the first fleeting glance had given her the coarse, vulgar faces, frowsy clothing, animal jaws furiously chewing tobacco. Of all living things that pass in the forest, man, at once the highest and lowest, is the only one that defiles the winter prospect. The wolf, the fox, mink, ptarmigan, smaller rodents, register their march only with the faint tracery of little feet. While hurrying by, Gabrielle instinctively held her breath.

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"Evidently a conspiracy." Templeton had whispered it at first sight. Now, in passing, he tried to ease the strain with a greeting: "Good morning, men."

It was, however, about the worst possible thing that he could have said. Declined with the rough ease which Nelson or Ferrier could have put into it, offense would still have been given to the harsh, wild instincts, natural anarchism of lumberman nature. Spoken, as it was, with an English accent, emphasizing the tone of patronage, it aroused instant resentment.

"Mornin' yerself!"

"An' how do *you* do, me men?"

The answers ranged from mere imitations of his accent to the evil insinuation in the remark Bartholomew sent after them: "Office kinder crowded, eh? Well, two's company, I reckon, out here in the woods."

It was not so much the words, which might very well have come out of rude ignorance. They took their point from the lewd accompanying sneer. So gross it was, so palpable, that Templeton stopped and clenched his fist. But before he could turn Gabrielle plucked his sleeve. "Don't heed them! For my sake, hurry on!"

Almost pulling him after her, she turned at right angles into a by-trail and broke into a swift run. But the gang had noted Templeton's pause, and as she flew along like a frightened hare, jeers and coarse laughter came floating

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after. Not till they were beyond earshot did she stop and face him.

“Do you wonder—now”—she panted, as much from anger as from the run—“that I am determined to get away? Oh!” Eyes, one big brown flash in the midst of angry blushes, foot viciously tapping the hard snow, she added, “I’d go, *now*, if I had to walk out. Oh, if I were a man!”

“You stopped me from going back.” He spoke from a sense of injury. “I’ll go now.”

He would have, too, for he had already shown that cowardice had no place in the sum of his weakness, but again she grasped his arm. “No, no! I didn’t mean it! They would kill you—this time. Let us go back to the camp?”

It was not very far, less than a mile. While they were walking she did not speak again; only whispered, just before they entered the office: “I am going in to rest—sleep, if I can. You had better do the same. And don’t forget. While the men are at supper put the horse-blankets in the sled, then run it out in the forest.”

## CHAPTER XIII

“**Y**OU didn’t stay out long.” The foreman laid aside his pipe when she entered.

He seemed a little surprised, but this changed to quick commiseration when she pleaded a headache. Refusing his offer to bring her a cup of tea, she carried a sharp twinge of remorse into her room; one that gave rise to the thought, “Oh, what will he think of me?”

After resting the greater part of the day she went over to the cook-house, where, under disguise of a “cup of tea,” she managed to make a fair meal. Here again her feeling of ingratitude was rendered more poignant by the cook’s kindness. A lump rose in her throat when, indicating half a dozen cans of condensed milk, he informed her that the rare delicacy was to be reserved for her sole use. She had hard work to hold back her tears at his parting admonition:

“Now ye’ll be the better av another wink av shleep. Go an’ lie down, an’ be supper-time I’ll have something ready that’ll lie light on the stomach.”

She was smitten once more when, coming out into the office at dusk, she was met by the foreman’s welcoming smile. “Head any better?”

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"A little," she answered, and in her softer mood replied quite gently to Ferrier's offer to hunt up some headache powders, "It is very kind of you, but I don't care to take them."

Before coming out she had folded the Hudson Bay duffle-blankets on her bed into a roll with such stealth that not even a rustle crossed the partition. She had also put on extra thick stockings under her arctics and laid out her wraps and furs ready to her hand. The clerk's absence from the room told that he was out upon his particular mission, so there was nothing left but to sit down by the fire and wait.

Had she required any strengthening in her purpose, it was there outside, for as soon as the lights were lit in the bunk-house, the shouts and laughter, quarrels over cards, all the noises that had frightened her last night, broke out again. But she did not. The spirit of her hardy forefathers, the spirit to do and dare that had sent many of them to their death in the snowy wastes beyond uncharted frontiers, burned like a lamp within her. If she shivered on occasion it was due to excitement, not fear. On the contrary, she was possessed by a vivid exaltation, elevation of spirit that sent her thoughts flying like vivid sparks across the curtain of her mind. When the cow-bell sounded the call for the men's supper she straightened, listening like a soldier to a trumpet.

When, half an hour later, they were making

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their way over to the cook-house, Templeton joined them, and before they went in he managed to whisper, "It's all done; bells off, sled out in the forest."

"Good!" she syllabled with her lips.

Nevertheless, in spite of its depth and genuineness her satisfaction was curiously mingled with another feeling; one dim, inchoate, that had in it regret, remorse, apprehension, if not fear. The warmth and cheer of the fire they had just left leaping brightly in the office, the yellow squares that pierced the dark mass of the bunk-houses, fire-flash of a lantern around the stables, rows of warm lights, golden oblongs that marked the cook-house windows and door, were fenced off from the vast spread of frozen night which she would soon enter by the dim cones of surrounding spruce. Within their dark circle lay life and light and cheer; beyond, uncertainty, cold surely, hunger perhaps, possible death by frost. A few tremors would have been excusable in a man. They were inevitable in a woman. But in the midst of a small shiver the Fates, which invariably egged on her purpose, provided the usual stimulant. While they were crossing, dark figures were still tumbling out through the golden oblong; discontented voices freighted the night with grumblings and curses.

"Miles must have made another cut in the ration," Nelson commented.

"Sounds like a menagerie at feeding-time," Templeton added.

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To Gabrielle it seemed even worse. Drawing closer to the clerk, she thanked her stars that a few more hours would see her out and away from it. In the mean time she was destined to undergo one more experience, that of a kind that would cause her to shiver and shake at the thought of it during the long hours she was to lie under the hay. For as the four of them sat at table, and she was beginning to plead a revival of her headache preparatory to withdrawing, there came a crunching of feet outside, and the door opened, admitting a dozen men.

For a few moments they stood in sullen silence, faces heavy and stolid, yet keenly vindictive, dark with anger. While she watched them Gabrielle received a vivid impression of wild cattle weaving and milling in their efforts to shove one another to the front. The illusion was heightened by a crunching of feet in the snow outside.

"Well, what can I do for you?"

When Ferrier spoke, the "milling" suddenly ceased, leaving Svenson, whose stupidity had almost brought death to both under the "fall," out in front. Dull-witted, yet quarrelsome as he was stupid, it would have been impossible to have picked a better tool for the rascals that had tutored him in his part.

"For why we have no milk ban the caffee?" Delivered in the high, flat tones of a vaudeville Swede, the question would have been absolutely



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ludicrous but for the real danger that lay behind. Stretching a long arm and finger at the canned milk the cook was saving for Gabrielle, he was going on, "I tank when the office have milk we gat it, too—" when the cook burst into the argument with characteristic Milesian heat.

"Phwat d'ye mane, shoving into me cook-house afther a male? If there's anny complaints it's to the office ye may be taking thim. Out, out wid ye! Out, iv'y last one av yez!"

Blue eyes screwed into glittering pellets, round face puckered in snarling rage, he was advancing to enforce the order with a frying-pan snatched, all hot, from the stove, when Ferrier interfered. "Easy, Miles; let's hear what they have to say."

"'Tis the canned milk; didn't yez hear him?" Glaring his contempt, he ran on: "More's the pity we haven't a plenty, for 'tis the proper food for the squarehead—on'y he should have it out av a bottle. 'Twas for the young lady I saved it, sorr, an' divil a one but herself shall taste it till Dominique comes back. The rest av yez, office or bunk-house, can take your coffee straight."

"There's your answer—" Ferrier began; the foreman's deep rumble finished—"and a mighty good one. Clear out!"

Instead of retiring, however, the crowd resumed its "milling." As its units shifted and shuffled, in efforts to escape the responsibility entailed by a position in front, the rustle of feet



"IF THERE'S ANY COMPLAINTS IT'S TO THE OFFICE YE MAY BE TAKING THIM.  
OUT, OUT WID YE!"



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almost, but not quite, drowned a sharp whisper behind: "Don't back down, Svenson. Go to it. We'll back you up!"

And the fool obeyed. "The young leddy?" His flat monotone broke in a cackling laugh. "Ass it young leddy that lives with men in affice? Young leddy? I tank she's—"

Before Ferrier stopped him the cook had gained striking distance, and the insult was never finished, for as the word trembled to the fool's lips he crumpled under a swashing blow of the pan. Ferrier had jumped to his feet, but the foreman was quicker yet. The heavy bench on which he was sitting flew back to the wall from the thrust of his straightening knees. As the Swede fell, Nelson's huge bulk split the mass of men with force that sent the two sections staggering back toward opposite walls. Through the opening, across Svenson's body, Gabrielle caught one glimpse of Bartholomew making for the door. The next instant he was kicking at the full upward stretch of the giant's arms, then, like a stone from a catapult, he shot out through the door. Swinging, he then seized Svenson by the collar, and, easily as though he had been a kitten, tossed him outdoors on top of his fellow.

"Next!" Eyes flaming, big body swelling with the lust for fight, he faced the others.

Had he been alone they might have tackled, for the lowering faces smoldered with hate and fury. But on one hand stood the cook bran-

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dishing his skillet; on the other Ferrier with the cleaver he had snatched from the meat-block. Behind them Templeton was coming on with a club he had picked from the woodpile. And just then a harsh voice rose above the buzz of excited voices outside:

"Come along, boys! This ain't our night out."

"No, but it will be pretty soon," a second voice yelled, as, grumbling and growling, with backward glances of sullen anger, the deputation filed out.

"You bet! An' when it is—we'll get you, both you an' your—" This time the epithet was drowned in a burst of defiant yells.

"No!" Seizing Ferrier as he started to go out, the foreman slammed shut the door. "It's freezing hard out there. Give 'em one chance to cool off!"

And it did not take long. Above a hubbub of eager talk they caught an occasional observation: "We've got all winter to do it in."

"They're here tighter'n in jail!"

"Sure, there ain't no rush."

Then, as the frost got in its work, the hum drew farther away and finally died. By the time the four had resumed their seats came the last bang of the bunk-house doors.

Pale and terror-stricken, Gabrielle had yet sat very quietly through all, and she managed to return the ghost of a smile when the foreman encouragingly patted her shoulder. "You're the

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real stuff, all right. I've seen women launched into whooping hysterics by less. But you don't need to be afraid. Those fellows take longer than an eight-day clock to wind up to the point of real mischief, and when Dominique arrives you'll see all their spite washed out by one bowl of soup. When they have some real beef to chew on Bartholomew and his gang can talk themselves thin for all the good they'll get out of it."

Great as was her fright, it was still subordinate at that moment to her anxiety concerning the effects of the incident upon her plan. She was sure that they would never allow her to go back to the office unescorted. At first she thought of asking Miles to take her over. But he would certainly stay there till the others came in. Finally, after a minute of heavy thought, she rose and addressed the clerk:

"My head is just splitting. Will you please go with me, Mr. Templeton?"

She shivered with thankfulness when Ferrier called after them as they went out: "Better stay there, Templeton, till we come. Then you can come back to your dinner."

"What a shave!" he whispered, outside.

"Wasn't it? I was afraid that one of them might insist on coming. Now you can help me get my things down to the stable."

The reflections of any girl on the eve of an elopement are apt to be deranged by excitement,

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and when in addition to the usual disturbances the case has complications in the way of a husband, clear thought becomes impossible. Such ideas as floated through Gabrielle's mind during the three hours she lay under the hay in the stable shot like lightning flashes through a storm of emotion.

"He said that it wasn't in me. Now he will see!" More often than any other, the thought flew along the rut it had worn in her brain during the last three weeks. And yet—in the moment of its passage she would experience a throb of pity similar to that excited by Ferrier's confession the other night.

"He will think—" Not once in the dozen or so of times that this thought began to form did it reach completion, for always she snatched down the blinds over her mental vision, refusing to see herself as he would see her. "I don't care what he thinks. He brought me here, kept me here against my will. I'm justified in using any means to escape."

The "means"—Templeton, to wit—naturally claimed a fair share of her reflections, and their character abundantly proved that she was not nearly so reckless as might be judged by her actions. He was a gentleman by birth and training, therefore could be depended upon to escort her in safety to the railroad! After that—circumstance would take charge. If he should happen to follow her to Montreal, and— At this

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point her old enemy of the caves, Gabrielle the Primitive, would stir and stretch languorously, indulging herself with small thrills and shivers. To offset which she would be compelled again to recite the tale of the clerk's perfect gentility.

When later her fire of excitement burned out from sheer exhaustion, doubts came flitting through the surrounding darkness. With a sudden reversion of feeling she saw herself not only with the eyes of Ferrier, the foreman, the cook, but also with those of her family and friends in Winnipeg and Montreal. If the news of the escapade ever leaked out? Or the clerk should not prove so gentle as the specifications? Or that she herself should be less strong than she— That possibility she dismissed every time it occurred with a summary denial. Nevertheless, it made itself felt, and, adding itself to other doubts that embraced in their dark scope the weather, trails, possible mishaps of winter journeying, helped to produce a cold reaction. If at that time she could have been transported by magical means to the safe warmth of her bed it is doubtful whether the clerk would have found her there when with slow caution he opened the door three hours later. Its creak, however, produced a second reaction, stirring the hardy soul of her ancestors within her. Creeping from under the hay, she moved forward to meet him.

Naturally, their hands were extended before them, and, touching, they were fused in a strong



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clasp by an electrical discharge of feeling. It seemed to her that every drop of her blood raced through her finger-tips to mix with his, and the call was rendered more seductively deadly by the utter darkness that wrapped them around. She did try to draw back when he began to pull her toward him, but her will seemed to have wilted. With a mingling of horror and delight she felt herself yielding. She thrilled at the touch of his hand on her wrist. Not until with a sudden clutch he drew her into a tight embrace did a sudden, terrible fear of herself produce the violent reaction that gave her strength to wrench loose.

"No, no, you must not!" She drew back from his searching hands.

"But—" his whisper, hoarse from passion, trembled in the darkness.

"No, no! I say *no!* This is—wrong. I ought to go back in."

"Oh no!" His tone changed to anxious entreaty. "I forgot myself. I'll behave—do whatever you say."

"Really?" It came tentatively out of a dark pause.

"Truly."

He swore to it with oaths that were as sincere as—himself. Nevertheless, they appeased her fears. She moved on to the escape. "However did you get out? I had forgotten that you were sleeping in the office."

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"I *was* stumped—for a while," he replied to her whisper. "Nelson sleeps like a cat, and was particularly wakeful after the row. He awoke when I opened the door, but I told him that I was going out to walk off a toothache. 'Call out when you come in,' he grunted. 'Else I may have you half strangled before I wake up.'"

"We must hurry." She took the initiative. "Untie the ponies."

"Wait till I strike a match." Its scratch sounded as he spoke.

Fortunately, it broke, and she grabbed his arm before he could strike another. "No, no! It might be seen."

"But we can't see!"

Then and there the first seeds of doubt in him were sown in her consciousness. Later his astonishing inefficiency would bring them to full growth, but just then she felt only wonder. "We don't have to. Back out the ponies. Now I'll take them while you bring the harness. It is on the pegs behind the stalls. We'll put it on out in the woods."

In comparison with the utter darkness of the stable, it was quite light outside with the reflection of the starlight from the snow, and the harnessing and hitching went with ease. In the course of it, however, she sustained a second shock when she caught him trying to buckle the hames on the collar upside down. Accustomed always to horses herself, such ignorance seemed

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incredible. Though her surprise expressed itself in a small giggle, he dropped another peg, nor did the arguments she had advanced in his defense with Ferrier help him with herself.

"You'll pardon me," she apologized for the laugh, "but they go on like this."

For a few moments after the last trace was hooked, while Templeton stood waiting, reins in hand, she looked back at the sleeping camp. Down a long vista one corner of a building showed a dim black mass against the snows. But she knew it for the office, and while she gazed upon it a strong sense of the irrevocability of her course burdened her spirit. Aided by a vagrant puff of wind, it caused her a sudden chill, and while she stood there, trembling with cold and foreboding, there flashed into her mind Ferrier's words:

"She's young and awfully pretty; can take her pick of a dozen good fellows."

Even more clearly than when she had heard it, memory supplied the pain and regret of the tone. Then, aiding the softness invoked by the knowledge that she was leaving him forever, came a flood of small kindnesses, little considerations for her comfort and happiness he had shown during the last month. Her eyes were wet when she stepped into the sled.

## CHAPTER XIV

**B**EFORE they had traveled three miles the moon began to shed filtered light through the clouds low down on the horizon, and presently its silver bark came sailing out upon a dark-blue sea flecked with silver-cloud islands. Ahead of them, the spruce lifted huge dark cones out of black pools of shadow, linked together by the ice-blue bands of the trail which ran before like a fairy path through a shining land. As far as the river the "tote trail" ran with the lumber-roads, and over its hard, icy surface the sled slid with the ease and swift slidings of a "cutter." In spite of its faintness a prismatic circle around the moon gave warning of hard weather; but, as neither Gabrielle nor the clerk understood the sign, their spirits rose in proportion as the miles slipped by.

For her unhappiness soon passed—and she should not be judged harshly for it. There is nothing so fluid as human emotion, so changeable, unless it be the bed of a desert river. Its course flows hither and thither, is deflected, reversed, changed, brought back by the winds of destiny, sands of circumstance. Later, when

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circumstance supplied the proper setting, she would suffer again. In the mean time the moonlight and motion, cheerful rattle of pole and harness, merry jingle of hoofs, all helped to raise her spirits with its sense of freedom, flavor of high adventure.

It had been done so easily she wondered at herself for having waited so long. Though had she taken thought she would have acknowledged that the journey entire could not run on these swift lines, it seemed just then that the Portage, Winnipeg, home, and friends lay but a few hours away down the shining trail. Even when, after they crossed the river and left behind the black masses of logs, the trail pinched out to the twin tracks left by Red Dominique's sled, it was still fairly easy-going in the shelter of the woods. All the way they chatted and laughed, bubbling over at the success of the plan. Their spirits attained the meridian when, about midnight, the black mass of the "Fifteen Mile" hut suddenly formed in a moonlit clearing.

In his desire to put distance between them and possible pursuit Templeton would have driven on. But here again her common sense ruled. "No," she denied his suggestion. "The trails outside will be bad. We must save the ponies all we can. While you unhitch and feed them I'll go in and cook"—the height of her spirits could be gaged by her happy laugh—"supper or breakfast, whichever it is."

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"But supposing they have missed us?" he argued.

"Not likely; and if they have it will take them an hour longer to make the distance with a heavy team. Before they could possibly arrive we shall have fed and be on our way."

She had begun to walk toward the hut. Then, remembering his first unskillfulness, she went back—providentially, for he began to unhitch at the wrong end, dropping the pole while the traces were still fastened. Taking it, as usual, for the signal to start, the ponies bolted for the stable, and had she not grabbed the reins a smashed sled would have brought the journey then and there to an end. But, though later the incident was destined to swell previous and subsequent mistakes into a real prejudice, she was too happy just then to accord it anything but laughter. Till the ponies were safely tied and unharnessed she stood over him holding the lantern. Then, leaving him to rub off the white fur of frost, she went indoors.

In woodman's fashion Dominique had left kindling and dry wood piled on the mud hearth, and, leaping from her match, the fire shed warmth and light over the rough log interior. Just as she had predicted, frozen bread and bacon, beans, coffee, and sugar were slung in grain-bags from the roof-poles, out of reach of possible animals. A frying-pan, coffee-pot, and tin serving-dishes stared at her from a rude rack on the wall. After

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thawing out snow enough for their coffee and setting a loaf of bread to thaw by the fire, she fell to slicing and frying bacon, while the firelight leaped and flickered, throwing its warm, soft lights over the pretty picture of domesticity.

Anywhere it would have passed current for a young wife preparing her husband's meal, and Templeton's exclamation when he came in proclaimed the fact. "By Jove!" he cried, in his English way. "It looks like a—"

Though he did not finish, her smile filled in the gap—a smile that, had he possessed the delicacy to interpret it, conveyed a very different meaning from the one in his mind. The pleasant gravity, deep musing, leavened with small smiles, which she maintained while serving him invested the homely office with the dignity of a consecration. A pity that he could not have seen the wife and mother that had been called into being by his unworthy touch. Within her, forces that are beneficent, make for strength and beauty of life when loosed in proper channels, forces that had been peremptorily checked on the verge of release over a year ago, were straining for expression with the added power of long suppression.

Before he came in, they had instigated her soft dreaming that touched barely on the borders of reality. If he *did* follow her to Montreal? And she were free? And—something came of it? Then—through her mind had flitted the thousand and one pictures of domestic happiness

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that form the staple of a healthy girl's visionings.

After the meal she rose and drew the soap-box that served for a seat over to the fire, there to wait till the ponies finished their feed. He not only followed suit, but placed his seat within a foot of hers. Her sleeves still clung above her elbows, where she had rolled them while cooking, revealing her arms' white molding. In the hollow of her left elbow a dimple lurked, a soft, seductive dimple that came and went, winked and blinked at each movement. Without actually watching him she felt his glances settle like a caress upon it, and, flinching, she began to roll down the sleeve.

"Please—don't!"

"Why?"

"It's—so pretty."

"All the more reason."

Nevertheless, she desisted. Conscious of thrilling a little under the caress of his glance, she sat, with hands folded in her lap, looking into the fire, until, stooping suddenly, he tried to plant a kiss on the elusive dimple.

"Oh, don't!"

Her sudden snatch had foiled him, and, warned by a certain sharpness almost of pain in her tone, he made quick apology. "You'll pardon me?"

"It is my fault. I ought to have covered it."

"But—you are angry?"

"No." She explained the sudden coldness



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which he felt while pulling down the sleeves: "Only—you aroused an—unpleasant memory."

Unpleasant, however, was a misnomer. Just as his lips brushed her arm memory had flown back to the night she had first met Ferrier. While sitting out a dance in the cozy corner of her cousin's house he had marked the dimple for his own with the first kiss that had ever passed between them. In spite of her pique, anger, jealousy she had not yet reached the point where she was willing to surrender it to another.

She was, however, rapidly approaching it. Five minutes afterward, the chill had passed from between them, and she fell again under the spell of that dangerous hour. It seemed to her that they were being drawn together by some powerful magnetic force. She had to guard against unconscious swayings that threatened the balance of her body and mind. Out of the tail of her eye she saw the outer edge of the box he was sitting on lift and sway in rhythm with her own impulses. Reacting upon her own emotion, the knowledge of his, prepared all for the inevitable explosion of feeling that ensued, when, their time being up, he helped her on with her furs.

It happened in the usual accidental way wherewith the Fates beguile poor mortals to their hurt. In putting on her coat the high fur collar turned under, and while adjusting it his hands touched the soft, warm flesh of her neck. The next instant they closed under her chin, and

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though in wild alarm at herself more than in anger at him she tried to break away, he pulled her head back and kissed her mouth.

In the instant their lips met, her body relaxed. Her will became as water. She swayed in his arms. If he had persisted—but, fortunately, he had misread the motive behind her struggle, and, afraid of pressing her too hard, he released her so suddenly that she staggered and almost fell. And, again misreading the wild, rich lights in her eyes, he warded off her anger.

“You’ll forgive me?”

“You—promised.” It came out of her after a pause with a little catch of her breath. Again it was not anger, but self-preservation that dictated her next words: “You—broke your word.”

“I know. But—my God! When my hand touched your neck I—I went blind. You’ll give me another chance?”

She was willing. After they had hitched the ponies and were driving on she taxed herself with it, rated herself soundly. Yet in the midst of her self-reproaches she shuddered at the memory of that moment of wild passion, and, shuddering, thrilled again. With mingled feelings of shame, pleasure, alarm, she was contemplating the long day and night that, with the best of luck, they would still be together, when a remark of his switched the current of her thought.

“It is breaking day.” His outstretched whip indicated the strip of gray in the black-blue of

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the eastern sky. "They are just getting up back at the camp. I'd give a couple of sovereigns to see Ferrier's face when he finds out we are gone."

As she was still unaware that he knew of her marriage, she did not realize the full caddishness of the remark. But if she missed its real significance it still set her thinking of Ferrier in a way that would have been impossible yesterday. For that flash of passion had left behind it an illumination under which many obscure things stood out sharp and clear. While she still thrilled from the kiss, trembled at the thought of her own weakness, looked forward with a sort of delicious terror to the ordeal ahead, the thought occurred that this was exactly what Ferrier had gone through with Susanne.

"And *he* wasn't married—hadn't even seen me then." The exculpation formed in her mind.

While the ponies were taking the few miles left of the woods at a fair trot she thought of his temptation with charity born of her own weakness. Whereas on all other occasions the first thought of Susanne would annihilate reason, she now placed the girl in the forefront of her mind, recreating her in all the pride of her sexual beauty—big, dark eyes, sensuous mouth, smooth skin, luxurious bust and limbs. Judging him by the enormous force that held her helpless in its grip, she arrived at a fairly just conclusion:

"I suppose it was—natural."

In accordance with the laws of woman's being,

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as laid down both by romanticists and preachers, the conclusion ought to have worked in her a change of heart in one of two ways. Forgiving, she might have turned again to her legal love; or, horrified by the enormity of self-revelation, she ought to have brought order among her riotous senses—in the old phrase, have renounced the flesh, the devil, and his works. As, however, she was neither a shining example for her sex nor a heroine of romance, but merely a pretty woman endowed with the customary human traits, she did neither. If anything, the softening of her judgment strengthened the instinct that held her—the huge, amorphous instinct that had behind it not only the desires of all women before her, but also of all life back to the beginnings of time. From the obscure muds of early geologic ages some tiny protozoan added its shove to those of the innumerable hands that were forcing her onward to nature's chief consummation—the production of still more life. And all that she had to pit against it was the knowledge and training of her own generation.

Yet she fought fiercely in an honest endeavor to achieve that which her generation held to be right. "Don't be a fool!" she lectured herself. "This is dangerous. Behave yourself."

But, though she managed to reason herself several times into a condition of comparative quiet, she made no permanent headway. In the

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midst of her chidings she would be seized and shaken again with tremors born of the instinct. Her first real gain came with a diversion of thought, when from the shelter of the woods they suddenly drove out on the prairie.

Simultaneously the sun had thrust a pale, silver edge up into the yellow band of frost along the horizon, and thus across a wintry landscape whose far white reaches were blotched with the harsh blacks of willow scrub and dwarf poplar they were able to see and judge of what lay before them. Whereas, so far the woods had kept the trail clear of all but the actual snow-fall and Dominique's sled had broken that, here in the open it lay buried under a foot and a half of packed drift. By virtue of the same instinct which enables a wise old ox to follow the windings of a trail across miles of plowed-up prairie the breed had laid his new track almost directly on top of the old. But, light as the winds had been since his passing, they had still sufficed to fill in the ruts. Only the fainter whiteness of the snow marked their path across the prairies.

"Do you think we can follow it?" Reining in the ponies, Templeton eyed the prospect with dismay.

The question properly belonged to her weakness, and once more she sustained a slight disillusionment. Her answer belonged to his strength: "It isn't a question of think. We'll have to."

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“But—there’s not a sign of a track.”

Trained by the snows of Quebec winters, her eye was better than his. “Oh yes, there is. Look about twenty yards ahead. Now, don’t you see it—outlined in faint white?”

“Blessed if I do!” He shook his head after a second puzzled glance. “I can’t see a thing.”

“Then let me drive.”

The ease with which he surrendered the reins did not help to restore his lost ground, and he receded once more when, half an hour later, she asked him to get out and help the ponies, which had plunged off the trail into a drift up to their necks, and he demurred, demanding that she lay on the whip. The next moment they were both out, upset by the animals’ plunging, and it was only with the greatest difficulty they were gotten back to the trail.

A little farther on, where, by the very force of the wind sweeping over clean prairie, the trail had been kept comparatively clear, they made better time, and by the time they arrived at a second bad place Templeton had learned his lesson. Leaping out, of his own volition, he helped the ponies up, then trudged behind the sled until from a wide circle northward the forest came sweeping back in a huge cape some miles in width. In comparative shelter, the trail ran fairly clear for the remainder of the distance to “Thirty Mile,” and when they were least expecting it the hut slid into view from behind a poplar bluff.

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For more reasons than one its black logs and snowy sod roof took on all the glammers of home. Out in the open a chill breeze had driven the frost through Gabrielle's furs; her hands were so numb she found it difficult to let go the reins. And the ponies were very tired. Between exhausting wallows in the drifts it had been one long, weary drag. Heads drooped, sides caved in, hides one mat of frost, their appearance justified Templeton's comment:

"They are all in. We were seven hours covering fifteen miles. We had better stay here to-night."

Though he spoke quite casually, some slight inflection impressed itself on Gabrielle's consciousness, stimulating a fluttering excitement that had origin in her fear of herself. Her answer took out of the instinct that urged for more time to think, reason, gain strength.

"A good feed and a long rest will bring them around. As yet we have made only thirty miles. If they follow—"

"With a heavy team?" he objected again. "They could never catch up. See what trouble we had."

"Oh yes, they could!" Sharp and clear Ferrier's face, with its eager eyes, suppressed force, square strength, all intensified by its frame of fiery red hair, flashed up in her mind, the more vividly by contrast with the inert good looks of the man before her. The idea of his being held

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back by a journey of thirty miles seemed so ridiculous that she almost laughed. Suppressing the inclination, she added: "A heavy team would go slower in the forest, faster in the drifts. We *must* go on to Forty-five Mile."

"Well, we have lots of time to think it over."

Again a curious inflection threw riot among her feelings. While she shook her head, repeating that they would go on, that other part of her, the part which at all times and seasons opposed her good judgment, accepted the doubt with secret exultance. Going in, after the ponies were stabled, she caught herself narrowly observing, and with a flavor of hope, a cloud-bank on the eastern horizon.

"If it begins to blow we cannot go on."

Realizing instantly the nature of the thought, she fell into a wild panic. "Oh, I ought not to have come!" Yet in the very moment her thinking, judging self expressed it, that other rebellious part indulged in glad defiance; nor would it down in the face of all her strict drilling. Nevertheless she kept at it. While lighting the fire and preparing their second meal she laid down a sober course of conduct for herself to follow, and—forgot it the instant Templeton stepped inside the door.

As he stood for nearly a minute on gaze at the pretty picture she made at work over the table his natural languor was obliterated by a glow of appreciation. In fact, he stood so long



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that at last she called him, with some confusion: "This is uncomplimentary to my cooking. Sit down, before everything freezes."

He made some complimentary answer and sat down. But whereas at the first meal she had hidden her natural embarrassment under lively chatter, she could not now talk at all. After one or two trivial attempts she relapsed into silence, kept her eyes on her plate, her ears on the wind in the chimney. Aware of what he would say when it began to moan, she looked expectantly up.

"It is beginning to blow. I'm afraid that we won't be able to go on."

He had stated it oppositely. On her side, she was afraid that they could and could not. Fear dictated her answer: "Oh, we *must*! If it blows a storm!"

"But if we can't travel, neither can they."

Once more Ferrier's face stood out in her mind. "Yes, they can. No storm will stop *him*."

"But why should he come at all?" he argued, with hypocrisy, for he knew quite well the answer she would not give. "You are free, able to come and go at will. Why *should* he follow?"

"Well—" In her stammering hesitancy, flushed distress, she looked for all the world like a pretty deer cornered by a ruthless hunter. He with his eager air and glowing face might well have been the hunter. "Well—you know that he constituted himself my guardian in camp."



"AND WHAT IF HE DOES COME? HE WON'T GET YOU!"



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"But you never admitted his claim."

"I know." She raised vexed shoulders. "But that will make no difference to him. In his own mind he is my guardian, and if he wants a pretext—you remember we have stolen his ponies."

"*Borrowed* them," he returned her phrase. "And what if he does come?" In his eagerness he was leaning half-way across the table. "He won't get you, because"—with a quick snatch he seized both her wrists—"because you are mine."

It had all come on so gently, from her first quiet observation of him in the forest a month ago, through days of communion that had risen to a climax in the black darkness of the stable, that she felt neither offended nor shocked. Oppressed with a feeling of inevitability that was the stronger for her past struggles, she made no resistance when he drew her around the table—that is, none other than her persistent pleading:

"Don't! Please, oh, *please* let me go!"

She kept on pleading it while, now faintly resisting, she was being pulled into his arms, while he was lifting her chin till her head rested on his shoulder at the full stretch of the round, white throat, till the murmur was cut off by his searching lips. But, and she knew it, her heart cried out for him to keep on. For it was the end, the end of the long battle between the flesh and the spirit. Her surrender was sealed by the sudden passion of her returning kiss.

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The end! He knew it; she knew it; but between the quality of their respective understandings yawned a wide gulf. If all creation, from the tiny protozoan to the last woman, her mother, was shoving her on, the movement was still governed by the instinct of modesty plus her training. The terms of surrender as she felt them were far from those of his expectation. After the first burst of passion subsided, she would have told him all—of her marriage, her struggles, temptation that had led up to her yielding, and if he had moved slowly, soothed her fear of herself, waited for a weaker moment? But he was too unskillful a *roué*. From the moment that Nelson told him of her marriage he had degraded her in his thought. Flushed, maddened by her returning kiss, eager to complete the conquest, he shifted his lips to the smooth, white throat; then—

The next instant she tore away, holding her torn dress at the throat, broke, thrusting him from her with force that sent him staggering back to the wall. Eyes black and brilliant as new coal, panting, she stood staring at him in anger and shame. From first surprise, his expression changed to injured protest. Then, smiling—a wheedling, ingratiating grin that added disgust to her anger—he went on to commit his last and greatest mistake.

“Oh, come, now; don’t be silly! If I didn’t happen to know—”

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"Know *what*?" She filled in his pause.

"That you are married."

"*You—knew—that? All—the—time?*" It came out of her in little gasps after a longer pause.

"Of course I did!" With cheerful foolishness he ran on: "If it hadn't been for that—well, you know, a fellow wouldn't think of carrying on like that with an innocent young girl."

She gave a little gasp. He would not have thought of "carrying on like that with an *innocent* young girl"? Out of his mouth it had come, the condemnation of her rebellion against a scheme of things which, just or unjust, was all-powerful to crush the mutineer. In that moment she received her first insight into its real nature, saw, among other things, that two wrongs cannot make one right, the folly of her own procedure, the inner side of Templeton's character. Like some foolish fly, she saw herself tangled in this web of her own weaving, while he, the spider, stood above her poised for the spring.

"Just when did you find it out?" It really did not matter. She was merely fencing for time to think.

The intonation, cold and precise, ought to have warned him. But nothing less than a surgical operation could have let the revelations of ordinary intelligence through the thick armor of his conceit. He replied quite glibly: "Nelson told me over two weeks ago. He thought I was

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showing a bit too much interest in you, and so tried to throw a fence around Ferrier's preserves. He never imagined, though, that you, yourself, would let down the bars."

*Let down the bars?* That was exactly the thing she had done. Her own hand had opened the inner recesses of her consciousness to the defiling gaze of this shallow cad. She sickened at the thought. The glaze which dimmed the soft blue of his eyes, sickly ingratiating smile, caused her a revulsion more vivid than any inspired in her by the rough men of the camp. Fleeing from the sexuality that there enwrapped her, she found it choking her again with more intimate emanations. Instinctively she held her breath.

With clearness that was disconcerting by its revelation of her previous blindness, she saw him now for what he was—a vain fool, whose only thought had been to flatter his conceit at her cost. So vivid was the vision that she shrank in dismay before its consequences. Placed by her own act beyond the protection of law and custom, alone with him in that snow-bound hut, she was at his will, subject to such mercy as he might choose to deal. Should she call, there was none to hear. The wildest cry would fade out on those frozen wastes. And his appearance alarmed her as he stood watching her across the table with eyes that glowed like hot blue glass.

"Oh, come, now; don't be silly."

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As he moved around she slid swiftly to the opposite side, and when he followed, repeated the manœuvre, kept repeating it whenever he stirred. All the while he kept on pleading in thick tones that filled her with horror and disgust. Sickened by the vulgarity of it, she braced herself against a sudden faintness with the sharp spur of anger. While slowly circling, her glance darted hither and thither in search of a weapon, and, finding none, she was driven at last to use woman's final and most powerful arm—her sex.

"Now listen!" She hid her loathing under a fair attempt at a smile. "You have broken your promise again. Soon I shall be unable to trust you at all. No; stop where you are. This will never do. We are not safe—here. At Forty-five Mile we shall be free from interruption."

His flush of gratification told of the interpretation he gave it. Still he pleaded: "There's no hurry. Let us stay—just a little while?"

"Not another minute. The ponies are well rested, and we must take advantage of the daylight. Now go. Do you wish to make me angry?" She checked his hesitation. "Very well, then; go at once and hitch. I'm dreadfully nervous."

"You needn't be." He looked back, on his way to the door, with a smile that made her furious by its assertion of possession. "He can't take you from me—*now*."

"Can't he?" She whispered it tensely after



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the door closed. "Oh, that he were here to try! Oh, why, *why* did I do it?"

After putting on her coat she stood gazing into the fire with eyes that were dark and distressed as those of a stricken deer while she thought over the probabilities. That Ferrier would follow she felt sure. But, rising late, as he did these idle days, it would be long after daylight before her absence was discovered. As yet he could hardly have gained to Fifteen Mile. In this, her extremity, she would have to depend on herself.

Presently a flash of hope shot through her dark meditations. She spoke to herself aloud: "I'm afraid that it is going to storm. But there is no other way. I'll try it."

Fastening the fur collar at her throat, she went out, leaving her heavy woolen scarf in plain view on the table.

## CHAPTER XV

GABRIELLE'S surmise concerning the probable happenings at the camp ran closely with the truth. The first rays that had shown them the white expanse of open prairie struck through the white frost of the office panes before Ferrier awoke. Templeton, who loved his bed, had always been the last to rise, and Ferrier exclaimed at the sight of his empty blankets:

"Well, well! What struck him?"

"Toothache." Sitting up in his bunk, the foreman stretched his great arms in a sleepy yawn. "He got up during the night to walk it off. I reckon you'll find him in the cook-house."

The fact that he was not there when they sat down to breakfast did not arouse their suspicions. "Still walking, I reckon." The foreman laughed. And as Gabrielle invariably came in for her morning coffee long after every one else had breakfasted, neither was her absence at all unusual. Finally, even when the stable roustabout, a French Cree half-breed, brought in a tale of lost ponies their suspicions went elsewhere.

"First I t'ink you tak' heem," the roustabout explained his delay in reporting. "Then I see

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you an' Mistaire Nelson come out of the cook-house, an' know he ees stole by some dam' t'ief."

"Bartholomew?" The thought occurred simultaneously to both, but was quickly disproved, for as they walked across to the stables to investigate they saw the red-eyed teamster coming out of a bunk-house.

"Svenson?"

The foreman shook his head at the suggestion. "Too damned stupid! His brains would never carry him that far."

In fact, they were in the stable handling the strings of bells which the half-breed had found in a corner before first light was shed on the mystery. Picking up the handkerchief which Gabrielle had dropped in the hay, the foreman looked down upon it with all of that quiet tenderness he always showed to the girl herself.

"How did it get here?" He had even asked the question before, looking up, he read the answer in the sudden, confused trouble of the others' eyes. Then on the instant the handkerchief, Templeton's absence, connected with a feeling that represented all that he had seen and heard during the last month. While his hand closed with a fierce grip on the kerchief his red-raw face turned purple with anger.

"By God! if I had thought—" he stopped; then, after a quick glance at the listening roustabout: "I'd forgotten. I told Mr. Templeton last night to drive down to Fifteen Mile this

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morning and bring in the grub. It's all right, Baptiste. He got an early start."

Already Ferrier was on his way to the door. He turned, going out. "Come on and make sure."

A couple of knocks at Gabrielle's door and one glimpse of her bed, stripped of its blankets, was more than sufficient to establish the fact. "I—I'd thought"—the foreman again clenched his big fist—"I'd have—"

"She's within her rights." Ferrier spoke with disconcerting quiet. His next words proved, too, that he had not been nearly so blind as they had thought him. "I knew that she found him attractive—and I didn't wonder. He's a handsome chap, well-mannered, carried himself with an air that impresses women. In her own time she would have found him out." He repeated the foreman's thought of yesterday, "She will yet."

"You are going after them?"

"Yes." The very quiet of the affirmation gave it tremendous emphasis. "But first we must cover her tracks. Tell the cook—"

"The truth," Nelson interjected. "He's a good friend of hers and yours."

"Very well. Then let him bring a tray at meal-times to the office, just as though she were sick. But you can tell him after I'm gone. While I'm getting ready please have the lightest of the work-teams hitched to a single bob. Tell the roustabout I'm going down to the river."

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Going back to the stable, the foreman did some thinking that prompted his earnest offer made just before Ferrier drove away. "Don't you allow that it would be better for me to go? Yes, yes." He hastily admitted Ferrier's vigorous shake of the head. "It's your job, only—I thought she might take it a little easier from me?"

"No doubt of it." But while conceding it, Ferrier again shook his head. "But this isn't the time for delicacy. No one can act for me."

"You'll take it slow?" The foreman made one last plea. "Do nothing rash?"

"It won't be necessary. She can take care of herself. The thing to be feared most is that the damned fool will get himself lost on the open prairies beyond Thirty Mile. There'll be a moon, thank God!" Gabrielle's faith in his persistence was justified by his conclusion: "I can follow on foot after the horses tire."

He returned the big man's strong hand-grip with interest that revealed something of the tide of feeling that surged under his outward composure. While his horses were covering the miles to the river, almost every turn of the trail recalled some memory. He remembered not only every word of his conversation with Gabrielle during the drive, but memory supplied her every subtle tone and accent. Passing the trampled patch where they had been thrown out in the snow, he groaned aloud, for very

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clearly now he realized how much the incident had to do with her flight.

Beyond the river, like them, he found it heavier going. Soon his clumsy beasts were snorting their distress. But, though he would fain have lashed them to higher speed, he restrained the inclination and pulled them down to a walk. It was, indeed, long after noon before, having stabled them, he entered the cabin at Fifteen Mile.

All the way his mind had operated, as it were, through stormy murk which was occasionally lit by vivid flashes of anger. A few hot embers still smoldered in the fireplace, and at the sight of the table, set out with tinware for two, he was seized with a furious impulse, murderous, violent. Striking the table with force that set the tins leaping almost to the ceiling, he went back to the stable and there remained, enduring the intense frost, till the horses finished their feed.

Not that he gained by it. Just as clearly as though he had remained in the house imagination recreated the meal, showed not only the two at table, but supplied every possibility of the *fête à deux*. To escape the torture he cut short the beasts' rest, took up again his chase of the white tracks that writhed ahead like silvery snakes. While they were unrolling under his bob he felt more cheerful, for, slight as the connection was, it still reached out through woods and prairies, binding him to Gabrielle at the

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other end. He was taking great comfort from the thought when midway of the afternoon he saw from the edge of the woods the drift flying in a cloud across the prairies.

At the sight of its white procession, sound of its stern cold hiss, hope froze within him. Like the prophet of old, he was minded to curse God and die. But for his determination that was impossible. Setting his teeth, he flogged his horses.

## CHAPTER XVI

**S**ITUATED on the opposite edge of the timbered cape that had afforded them shelter the last few miles, the Thirty Mile hut commanded a view of the prairies which ran unbroken southward to Norway's road-house, fifty miles away. Thus, when Gabrielle came out she was confronted with the same phenomenon that had just stricken Ferrier with blank dismay—the drift scudding before the wind.

During the few seconds she stood on gaze its stern hiss raised acute memories of her last experience with such weather. So startlingly clear were they, so complete in every detail from the first slow freezing of her hands and feet to the unendurable agony that followed their thawing that she shivered with apprehension. Her glance backward at the hut signified a sudden weakening; and, though the next instant her resolution was braced by Templeton's shout, "All's ready, come on!" the sight of the drift compelled a change of plan.

"I'm coming."

The clear, high note of her answering call carried no hint of her purpose. When, helping her



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in, he sank his fingers into the soft flesh of her upper arm, she did not shrink. On the contrary, she smiled up in his face, while exclaiming, "Oh, I have forgotten my scarf!"

"Don't get out." He checked her move. "Hold the lines. I'll fetch it in a jiffy."

While inside he did catch the low groan of turning runners, but the sound was smothered by the drift the instant the sled swung around. Ascribing it to the ponies' restless stepping, he paused long enough to inhale the faint perfume that clung to the scarf, then found and kissed the moist spot where her breath had congealed over her mouth. Short as was the time, it still sufficed for the ponies to gain the first turn of the trail around a poplar bluff. Thus, when he came out again his astonished eyes gave him only the leafless poplar bending in the wind, the black mass of the stable looming dimly in flying scud.

His first glance went southward, in the direction they were to travel. But between him and the dark loom of a poplar a quarter-mile away no object intervened. Inspired with a sudden belief that she had drawn the ponies behind the stable out of the wind, he ran there, her scarf fluttering over his shoulder. Then he saw—the tracks leading backward on their trail.

Unable to believe it as yet, hoping, believing that the ponies had run away, he ran after her at the top of his speed. By the time, however,

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that he gained the first turn she had taken the second. A straight run of a quarter of a mile led on to the third, and by running hard he succeeded in catching a fleeting glimpse. The sled and ponies, going at a fast trot, loomed out of the drift, and he saw the whip rise and fall.

Dumfounded, he stood staring at the twin tracks which led from him to Ferrier, thirteen miles away. If with less despair, at least with greater surprise, he stared till the truth was testified by his unwilling mouth:

“By the Eternal! She’s gone back to him!”

Gabrielle herself would never have acknowledged it—that is, in so many words. Though the ponies were back-tracking with a will, and making good going in the sheltered woodland, though every mile that slid under the sled brought her just so much nearer the camp, she somehow managed to obscure the issue from herself. Suppressing a secret content with the sudden turn of affairs, she told herself with perfect truth that it would have been impossible for her to have gone on. And if one could not go forward nor stand still, what was there left but the back track?

“Besides,” she summed this branch of her reflections, “it was the trick of a sneak to leave like I did.”

Here at least she was perfectly sincere. Hindsight is proverbially clearer than foresight,

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and when apprehended by senses that have been whetted by mortification and the discomforts of frozen travel, the camp, with its kindly foreman and friendly cook, took on all the glammers of home.

In reviewing her late experience she was, however, perfectly sincere. Her flushes of anger, thinking it over, deepened into hot blushes as she contemplated the deeps of passion suddenly uncovered in herself. That she had barely missed catastrophe, been saved by his bald approach, revolted by the animalism against which her spirit always rose in arms, she frankly acknowledged. She knew equally well that if he had used more delicacy, simply let her own feeling run its appointed course, she might not have escaped at all. And, while she trembled with thankfulness, there was born again out of her own weakness a feeling of charity toward Ferrier.

Once more with deeper pity she recalled the pain and regret in his voice while he was planning unselfishly for her happiness in the office the other night. Then, treading on the heels of these softer reflections, came thoughts of his manliness, capacity, strength of body, will, and purpose, all of which shone by comparison with Templeton's astonishing inefficiency. For it would have been unnatural had she failed to draw the contrast. Under the illumination of experience, every mistake he had made that day, from the reversal of the ponies' collars to the

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hazardous unhitching, stood brightly out, were added to the long record of blunders that were the stock joke of the camp. It is to be feared, moreover, that just as previously she had extended more charity than his failings deserved, she now viewed them with undue severity. But, unfair or not, the effect was eminently healthy for her mind.

Burning with shame at the thought of permitted liberties, she taxed herself again and again: "How could you? How could you? How *could* you?" And while her cheeks glowed in spite of the frost the thought shot through her contrition and shame: "Oh, *what* will they think of me at the camp? I can *never* face them."

In sudden alarm she pulled hard on the reins and even made to turn. Then, checking the wild impulse to hide, came the remembrance of Templeton barring the southern trail. "It's my own fault." She shook the reins again. "It serves me right for being so headstrong. I shall just *have* to face it."

By this time the ponies had covered the five or six miles across the timbered cape, and there suddenly opened before her the stretch of prairie, dim with drift, that lay between her and the main body of forest. Its white threat, cold, freezing breath, forced in the doubt whether she would ever reach camp at all. Out of which was born an intense yearning to find herself safe and warm within its rough harborage. It rose in her mind

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a cozy picture of the office, fire leaping in the mud arch of the chimney, dyeing with its ruddy stain the dark log walls, quiet faces of Ferrier and the foreman at opposite ends of the hearth. She placed herself between them, then—the fire vanished, quenched by the icy drift that smote her face the instant she left the timber.

For a mile or two she was able to see the sled-tracks, but these soon filled, presently were only to be discerned where some bunch of scrub willow held back the drift. She had this in her favor, the ponies were headed homeward, and with the supernal instinct that transcends the most cunning plaincraft, the plucky little beasts held the trail. Neither was she the Gabrielle of six weeks ago. Out of the tales that had passed around the office fire she had picked her alphabet. "Leave them alone! Leave them alone!" She rebuked in herself the impulse to guide them when they faulted, and always they repaid her faith by climbing back, to wrest another mile from the blind grip of the storm.

Could they last out? There was the rub. Dire question, it was driven in by the distressful jerking of the sled so different from the springy ease, restrained power of their usual gait. In the very center of the blind, white chaos that reigned between the woods they made their first stop.

Very wisely she gave them breathing-time; just sat and stamped her feet, beat her hands till their flanks ceased distressfully heaving. To

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gain the forest before dark—she had it always in mind; and cold as she was, and growing colder, she humored and coaxed, pulled miles, half-miles, quarters, out of them with skill and restraint that would have excited the admiration of a veteran plainsman.

Could she have seen the black line of timber coming out to meet her it would have eased the suspense. But the drift drove, a solid wall between. With no mark to gage her progress, her anxiety deepened when a perceptible darkening of the scud foretold the approach of night. To lighten the load and warm her feet she now got out and walked behind. But even then the tired animals kept stopping every few hundred yards, nor moved till she used the whip. When at last they refused to respond to the lash, stood shaking their heads in thickening gloom, she was seized with wild panic.

“Oh, *why* doesn't he come?” The hope she had carefully concealed so far now burst its bonds. Moreover, a wave of indignation, quite illogical but equally feminine, swept through her fear. “I was sure that he would. It's *mean*.”

The tear that froze on her eyelashes was due more to wounded feeling, indeed, than fright. Yet, though it was most humiliating to realize that she had been allowed to go without pursuit, pique was dominated by her sense of justice. “It is all my own fault. I never even thanked him last time. If I freeze to death it will serve

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me right. I'm hateful, a *hateful* little beast, anyway. But I'm sorry, and I should like to tell him—"

She did not finish for the good and sufficient reason that the opportunity to carry out the wish just then presented itself. Following the click of a neck-yoke and pole, a dark mass formed in the loom of the drift. Then, stopping of their own accord, Ferrier's horses stood rubbing frosty muzzles with her ponies.

Her first impulse was to cry out in sudden joy. Had she obeyed the next, she would have run away. Resisting both, she stood and watched Ferrier's dark figure come plunging past the ponies up to his waist in snow. She was thankful for the dusk that hid her colors. Also, she trembled with apprehension. A man, he was fairly certain to do or say the wrong thing, and surely the situation lent itself to blundering. Yet in the few seconds required for him to struggle through the drifts and reach her he pulled his wits together.

"Had to turn back, eh?" He spoke in the most casual manner. "I thought you would find it a bit too much. Now that you have seen for yourself, you can testify to our sincerity."

It was so different from anything she had a right to expect, and her suspended breath loosed in a sigh of relief. It was, indeed, so very different that she found it difficult to find an answer. While she was casting about for one he again filled in the pause.

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"It's lucky, too, that you turned back, for it's framing up again for a big storm. Templeton concluded to go on?"

"I—I suppose so." In her embarrassment she blurted out the truth. "I—I left him behind—at Thirty Mile."

He had begun to unhitch the ponies, and his back was now turned. In any case the dusk would have hidden his first flash of anger, succeeding smile. "Well"—he coughed—"there's grub enough there to keep him from starving. He can go on when the weather clears."

Rendering it still easier for her by his acceptance of the situation, he added, a little later: "I can understand your eagerness to get away, and if I wasn't sure of the storm I'd take you right on. But if you say so we'll just go back to Fifteen Mile and try again in the morning?"

With Templeton at Thirty Mile he was quite safe in making the offer. She replied with an attempt at lightness: "You are not to be rid of me so easily. I've had all of this that I want. If you don't mind, I'd prefer to go back to the camp."

Under her flippancy, however, she was unaffectedly glad—glad, almost, as he was, which is saying a great deal. With a touch of secret pride, she watched him unhitch his team, throw aside the bob, and rehitch to her sled, working with rapidity that brought by contrast Templeton's astounding inefficiency once more into her mind.



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When, in a few minutes, she found herself seated beside him, with her ponies following behind, she drew a long breath, in which relief mingled with the old sense of safety and comfort.

Relieved of the drag of the sled, the ponies kept the pace set by his powerful team, and as they moved rapidly forward, bucking the drift, Gabrielle watched with a certain awe the dark figure beside her. Bent slightly forward, his attitude expressed absolute concentration. Curiosity rather than timidity prompted her question:

"Can they keep the trail?"

"Easily." He replied without removing his eyes from their steady regard ahead. "We have the advantage of my first tracks."

"You don't mean to say that you can *see* them?" she cried out, in surprise.

"Of course; can't you? Don't try to look ahead. Keep your eyes about five feet to the left of the nigh horse's feet. Now do you see?"

"A—a faint whiteness to the right—right under them?"

"That's it," he confirmed. "Plain as a pike road—providing you don't look at it."

"Now I've lost it again. I could never follow it myself."

"Oh, I don't know. You were doing pretty well. I was scared stiff when I came out of the woods and saw the drift."

"But it was the ponies. I just gave them their heads."

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"Well, it takes some head to do that. Ninety-nine women out of a hundred would have tried to drive them. You'd have pulled through, all right."

"Oh no! The ponies were tired out. I was on the verge of despair when you arrived."

But though she disclaimed it, his tribute caused her a glow of pleasure. Its warmth, however, was altogether mental. He looked around quickly when she began to beat her hands. "You are cold? We shall soon be in the woods out of the wind."

In little more than half an hour, indeed, the horses stopped with their noses against the stable at Fifteen Mile. But by that time she was so cold and stiff that she tottered and fell back in her seat when she tried to rise, and, just as he had done a month ago, he picked her up and carried her inside. This time, however, she was not frozen. By the time he had built a fire she was able to move about the room.

When, springing from his match, the firelight filled the place and showed her the tinware lying just where it had been scattered by the furious blow of his fist, she blushed scarlet and bit her lip. Nor did she recover her composure till he went out to stable the teams. Undecided she stood then, small teeth still set in her lip, looking down on those mute witnesses of her folly. That it was her duty to prepare food for him she knew. But, though faint from hunger, the thought of her last meal at that table filled her with loathing.

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"I couldn't eat," she said to herself; "but he must be fed."

Picking up the tinware, she stood for a moment, then under the urge of a sudden impulse cast it all into the fire—from where it stared at Ferrier with red-hot faces when he came in. Nor did he fail to notice. Outside it had been too dark for him to see her. But as she now moved around the table, setting it with other dishes from the wall-rack, he probed her face with stealthy glances. A great deal of mortification, even more shame, a great weariness, these it returned to his search, and while he studied them covert apprehension died out of his own. Without words, without even her knowledge, the question which had made of that day one long torture received satisfactory answer.

"He can go—now," was the form it took in his thought.

That left him free to talk. "They are tired, but a long way from all in," he replied to her inquiry about the ponies. "After a good feed and a few hours' rest they will run into camp on two legs."

"Then you intend to go on?" she asked.

If unable to give the real reason that to return during the night would cover her absence, he managed one equally as good. "Yes. The food question is becoming quite serious. If we can get this grub into camp for breakfast it will ease things up for a while."

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The next instant he settled her compunctions concerning the meal: "Cook all you want for yourself. I'm not hungry." Which would have been more correctly put had he said that he was no more minded to eat there than she herself.

He made her, however, drink a cup of hot tea, and while she was drinking it proceeded to set her mind at rest concerning the *tête à deux* which appeared inevitable. "We won't start till late. In the mean time you must sleep."

By the time she had finished her tea he had arranged a comfortable couch on a bunk with the furs and blankets from the sled, and before she lay down he made her remove her arctics and moccasins, which he set to dry by the fire. "Start warm and you'll keep warm," he quoted the northern maxim. "I'll heat stones while you sleep, for your hands and feet."

Picking up a tattered copy of an old magazine, he turned his back and read, or pretended to, till a long slow sigh told him that she had fallen asleep. After feeding the fire till its light plainly revealed her face he sat watching her, put in two long hours in silent contemplation of the pretty nose, long dark lashes on the soft, pink cheek, all framed in a brown tangle of hair—though it would never have been suspected from his abstracted gaze at the fire when at his call she finally awoke.

"Sorry to break your sleep," he apologized.

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"I gave you every second I could. The horses are hitched and waiting."

It was all in line with his previous care and consideration. Deeply moved by it, her hands trembled so that she could hardly lace her mocasins. Gaining upon her at the sight of the hot stones, all ready for her hands and feet, other small arrangements for her comfort, the feeling of gratitude expressed itself in the sudden thrusting out of her hand.

"You have been—*so good!*"

If he had given way to his impulse this history might then and there have achieved a pleasant termination. But the disaster that followed so precipitously upon the loosing of a like impulse the other day was still fresh in his mind. Though he trembled with emotion that complemented her own, he remembered and refrained. And perhaps he was wise. Sensing the impulse, she had already begun to shrink. Then, by some strange contradiction, as they went out together, disappointment mixed curiously with a feeling of relief.

## CHAPTER XVII

**T**IPTOEING through the dark office shortly after midnight, Gabrielle re-entered the little room she had left as she thought forever. Not by the slightest stir did the foreman—who heard her quite plainly—betray the fact that he was awake, but no sooner did she place her hand on the bed than she discovered his thoughtful care in the new blankets with which it was spread. It was as good as a welcome. When she snuggled under them the thick, soft folds settled around her like a warm caress, a mute answer to the question she had asked on the trail: “Oh, what *will* they think of me?” Happy in it, she soon dropped asleep.

After being up all the previous night she slept heavily, the drugged sleep of nervous and physical exhaustion, yet toward morning there entered into her consciousness a huge, angry voice, a demoniac voice, whose compass ran from the deepest diapason to a note shrill as the scream of a frightened woman. For, whereas the worst of storms had power to draw from the forest no more than a heavy moaning, in this, the wildest blizzard of that wildest of winters, the great

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trees bent like willow wands, writhed and tossed; dim, ghostly shapes in the smothering drift. Awakened at last by their roaring protest against the bully wind, Gabrielle's startled ears were assailed by the clash of rending limbs, boom of fallen trees, wild squealing of tortured copse and brake.

Rubbing the sleep from her eyes, she watched the rich trove of soft snow that lay three feet deep on the floor of the forest, whirled by the wind in smothering clouds that enveloped the buildings and drove fine, white sprays through every crack. It had grown much colder. Along the eaves a dozen jets, white as steam, puffed through the interstices of the roofing sods. The hay between the poles was festooned with a glittering lace of white. The deep breath she took with a yawn bit her lungs like acid. Shivering, she huddled again under the clothes.

"Don't get up," the foreman called to her. "It's about sixty-five below outside and almost as much inside. I've just started a fire, and after it warms up a bit we'll go out, and you can come out here to dress.

"Storming?" he repeated her question. "I should say it was. It's lucky you changed your mind and came back."

He could not see the small smile called forth by his tact, for not only did the partition intervene, but only the tip of her nose showed outside the clothes. He did catch the hearty ring

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in her answer, however: "I'm glad, awfully glad, that I did." If a touch of shame and contrition chastened her feeling it was good for her. It prompted her honest answer to Nelson's further inquiry concerning her health: "I feel—like the returned prodigal at the sight of the fatted calf."

His rumbling laugh shook the partition. "A bit of bacon's the best we can do. You shall have it, sliced thin and fried brown, when we come back from breakfast."

The wooden door-bolt clicked frostily just then in its socket, and the prodigal feeling took deeper hold as Ferrier's voice, in hushed tones, floated over the partition: "I brought her hot water to wash with. Set it on a box here, close to the fire. That's good. Now we had better go on over."

"And remember," the foreman called a warning back from the door, "you are not to step outside. We will bring your breakfast over."

"Oh, that will never do!" she exclaimed, after the door closed, in humility of spirit born of her deep repentance for all the trouble she had caused them. "I must dress quickly and go after them."

But when, having made her toilet in comfort before the big fire, she opened the door, she recoiled from the bitter blast that instantly froze the tip of her nose and put a wee white spot on each cheek. Disconcerted, she returned to the



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fire, and had no sooner rubbed out the frost-bites than the two returned.

A hot pan had kept her breakfast warm in transit, and when Ferrier lifted it, revealing toast and tea, bacon thinly sliced, finally a pyramid of hot cakes that rose in diminishing size to a small button, she recognized it at once for the fattened calf. "The trouble the poor man took!" she exclaimed. Then, spying the tin of condensed milk which stood sentry over all, she added with a touch of remorse: "But I wish he would keep that for the men. I like my tea just as well without it. They need it more than I."

"Nonsense!" Ferrier laughed, the first laugh she had heard from him since she entered the camp. "The few cans Miles held out for you wouldn't give them a taste all round."

"Not a taste," the foreman backed him up. "They'd lap it all up at one meal."

While they were breakfasting he had informed Ferrier of fierce bickerings over the food the preceding day, and now, just as they were discussing the subject, there came a knock at the door. In answer to Ferrier's "Come!" half a dozen men filed in. During the few seconds they stood "milling," before the boldest spirit was forced to the front, Ferrier noted that not one of them belonged to the natural malcontents. All were dependable fellows who in ordinary times went quietly about their tasks without complaint. This fact supplied real cause for alarm, and Fer-

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rier's quick glance at the foreman expressed his uneasiness.

"Well, Teetzel, what can we do for you?" In accordance with camp punctilio the foreman spoke.

"It's about the grub." The leader, a stocky fellow, broad almost as he was high, with an honest look on his raw, red face, glanced around at his fellows. Encouraged by their nods, he went on: "We ain't standing for no sech rough-house business as was pulled off t'other night. But we *have* been sorter sizing up the stores, an' we don't see why there ain't enough to serve a full ration till Dominique comes in."

"Yes, if he comes to-morrow—or the next day." The foreman nodded. "But it's pretty safe bet that he won't. I don't have to tell you what he's up against—stuck, upset, reloading, snatching his sleds along through the drifts thirty and forty yards at a time. He'll travel the distance five times over before he arrives, without counting this storm, which will sure hold him back another two days. According to my reckoning, he's crawling along somewhere between Norway's and Sixty Mile. And listen!" In the pause the cabin shook under the rude buffetting of the screaming wind. "That ought to be answer enough. There's not the slightest chance of his landing before the end of the week."

To a fair mind his argument would have seemed unanswerable. But he was not appeal-

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ing to minds. Gross, heavy animals, these men were governed altogether by the stomach which urged them to feed fat now, let come what may. Shuffling uneasily, the deputation communed in discontented whispers.

"Then we don't get any increase?" The leader broke a sudden pause.

"Can't do it, Teetzel." The foreman shook his head. "If this storm doesn't let up tomorrow we shall have to cut the ration again." Throwing all of his natural kindness into his manner and tone, he concluded with an appeal. "Now, don't reckon that we are thinking you have enough to eat. If you had—well, you wouldn't be allowed to lie idle in camp. All I say is that it isn't going to kill you to take up another hole in the belt and help us tide over the pinch for a few more days."

It was wasted. That was proved by the growls and grumbles, the backward glances at Gabrielle's breakfast, scraps of talk carried in by the wind through the open door.

"Bartholomew was right!"

"You bet he was!"

"Fine words to fill empty bellies—"

"With them eating private in the office."

The remainder was cut off by the closing door, but the two had heard enough.

They had forgotten Gabrielle in their serious consideration of the situation. Now she broke in: "Oh, I'm so sorry! They looked *so* hungry."

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Their eyes just ate up my food. I feel as if—I were robbing them.”

“Nonsense!” Ferrier laughed, and again the foreman supported him. “The bit you eat doesn’t amount to a sparrow’s pecking. Light right into those hot cakes, and don’t leave one of them, unless you want to offend the cook. Don’t you bother. We’ll find some way of feeding them for another week.”

It was, however, no easy problem. While they talked, considering, rejecting, suggesting, it seemed to the listening girl that the shadow of starvation deepened over the camp, embodied itself in a huge amorphous shape that roared with the strident, threatening voice of the storm. Her eyes darkened and dilated at Ferrier’s question:

“Do you think that they might try to rush the stores?”

“First thing we’ll have to guard against,” the foreman answered. Then, in perfect unconsciousness of the consequences that would follow, he suggested, “Why not bring them in here to-night?”

“Good idea.” Ferrier accepted it at once. “We’ll move them after dark. I’ll go over now and tell the cook.”

All this time Gabrielle had not eaten a morsel, and, noticing it after Ferrier had gone out, the foreman with rough kindness bade her go on with the meal. But she was still in the shadow of

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impending hunger and want. She shivered from apprehension more than cold. "It is really serious now?"

"We have grub, on short rations, for just five days," he answered, between puffs of his pipe. "There's about two days' more at Forty-five and Sixty Mile. If the weather permits I shall go out myself to-morrow and get it."

"Oh, but—then—" she broke off, blushing. "You know—*he* is there."

In spite of his best efforts to suppress it, a little grin broke out on his face. So infectious it was, with its mixture of humor and sympathy, she could not escape the contagion. She laughed through her blushes. "At least he was when I left."

"You don't mean to say"—pipe suspended between thumb and forefinger, he looked at her while the grin spread over his face—"you don't mean to say—"

"Yes, I do." With mischievous demureness she confessed: "He went back in to get my scarf. When he came out again—I wasn't there."

His deep laugh drowned for the moment the roar of the storm, and for fully a minute there—after a train of grins disrupted the solemnity of his morning smoke. Her expression, watching him, gradually changed from demure amusement to timid suspense. Presently she spoke:

"I suppose you were—dreadfully shocked?"

"Not a bit." He emphatically shook his

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head. "You had to have some one to drive you."

"To drive? To *drive*? Why—I had to do everything myself." He had to laugh at her pretty disgust. But it quickly changed to strained distress. "But—you know, it wasn't for that, anyway, that I took him. It was because—" she paused, looking at him in distress through her blushes. But the desire for honest confession prevailed, and she went on: "I tried to bind myself to the truth. But I can see it all now. I took him because I—liked him. We—eloped."

"Now, look-a-here!" Leaning forward, he drove in every word with a tap of the pipe on the palm of his hand. "You're not to be blamed for that. Right from the beginning I saw what was coming and tried to head it off. You gave me some shivery moments, but I knew that if you had time you would find him out, that he'd be sure to give you a peep into his empty insides."

"But—but"—she asked it in terror—"but why did I like him? Surely it shows something wanting in myself."

"Not a bit of it," he cheered her. "He had it all: looks, youth, nice manners, everything a girl likes on the outside. The experience wasn't wasted. You have learned a good lesson in life."

She looked up, comforted, but still sighing. "It is very different, isn't it—I mean real life

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from the imitation one gets in books? Yes, I think that I have learned—something.”

“Charity?” His kind eyes gleamed with quizzical inquiry.

“Yes.” After a pause she continued: “But isn’t it queer? Yesterday I felt—was sure—that I could forget and forgive. But this morning, now that the impression has weakened, I’m—not so certain.”

“That’s inconsistent.”

“I know it.” She wrinkled her brows. “It’s this way, I think: though I have been made to feel my own weakness, I should like him to have been strong.”

“And isn’t he strong?” A note of indignation warmed his tone. “Let me tell you, young lady, that it takes a mighty strong man to break short off like he did—one very much in love to boot.”

“Then you think that he—still loves me?”

“Now you are joking.”

Confused by his critical regard, she turned her eyes on the fire, and silence fell between them. Through the blue haze of tobacco-smoke he studied her thoughtful face with kindly, critical eyes. “Still a bit jealous—of the other. But—she’s coming.”

Looking up shortly thereafter, her lips trembled toward speech, but before the words issued the door opened and Ferrier came in. “Miles will have everything ready,” he announced. “We’ll begin right after supper.”

## CHAPTER XVIII

**T**HAT evening the wind dropped even more suddenly than it had arisen; so suddenly, indeed, that the business of transferring the stores had to be postponed till the camp had gone to its bed. Contributing her share to the labor after it began, Gabrielle acted as doorkeeper, opening it for the men when they brought in their loads. Accordingly, she was still up when the foreman declared his plans for the morrow.

"If it holds fair I'll take the ponies and bring the grub in from the huts."

He said it as they were going out for the last load, and when he returned a minute ahead of the others she took the opportunity to put the question in her mind: "What will you do with—*him?*"

"Now, don't you bother." He took one little hand between his great, rough paws. "If the weather settles I shall take him on to Sixty Mile."

The others were coming and there was no time for more. Nor was it needed. If not happy, she went to bed satisfied.

There could be no better augury of clear



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weather than the deep, almost weird silence which brooded over the dark camp all night. Morning broke fair and frosty, and so still, so very, very still, that the reports of frost-riven trees rang like pistol-shots in the hush of the forest. Rising early, Nelson dressed so quietly that Gabrielle never even awoke. But Ferrier did. Dressing with equal stealth, he helped the other to hitch and get away.

"About that fellow—" he began, after a glance upward at the stars which had begun to pale in the dawn.

"I made up his pay-check last night." Nelson carried it on from the pause. "Cameron will cash it for him at the Portage. If it holds fair I'll take him on to Sixty Mile. Then when Dominique comes along he can follow the tracks out."

"Good!" Ferrier nodded approval. Just before the other drove off he added: "You might give him a hint that it will be healthy for him to move on before we come down in the spring."

"Leave it to me." The foreman's threatening growl was sufficiently informing without the following words: "After I've finished with him he won't be able to get out too quick."

"Thanks. You've been mighty good, Nels."

The tone carried more than the words, and its quiet gratitude was amply repaid by the bone-cracking squeeze of the giant's hand. "Nonsense!" He laughed. "Things sure looked bad

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for a while, but it has all turned out for the best. Only be careful and don't frighten her with any more brash plays." With that intuition which always seemed so foreign to his robust frame he argued: "You know how she must be feeling—kinder sick, sore, and ashamed. She'll need a little time to settle and forget. If you go easy I'll miss my guess if she don't come walking into your camp of herself."

Making his way back to the office, Ferrier entered so quietly that Gabrielle was not disturbed. Lying in his bunk in his clothes, he listened for her breathing, and so still it was that he caught also the small sighs that spaced its slow sweet rhythm.

His heart had leaped at the foreman's cheering words. It swelled now with tenderest feeling. Out of the travail and sorrow, jealousy, remorse of the past year was born a moment of peace, one of those rare moments when, purged of all that is earthly, the spirit rises to its highest. While his thoughts quested hither and thither, building, contriving for her, his face took on a radiance that she noticed when she came out, an hour later to find her breakfast set out again before a roaring fire.

In spite of its brightness his welcoming smile carried with it a touch of pathos, a suggestion of weariness and long waiting, that caused her a twinge of pity. Drinking her coffee, she fell into soft musings after he had gone out, tender

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musings which set the dimples twinkling at the corners of her mouth. For a long time they came and went before they were wiped out by a thought that proved the foreman's intuition.

"Oh, stop—not yet!" The murmured exclamation bore out his feeling that her late experience would have to dwindle and fade. "It is—*sacrilege!*"

Nevertheless, all that day they kept recurring, the thoughts of her virginal love; they went with her that night to her bed, passed even into her dreams, softened the smile she returned to his greeting when she appeared next morning.

"He'll be gone two more days," he replied to her question about Nelson. "In the mean time I will do my best to fill his place."

She looked up quickly, suspecting a reproach, but no shadow of pique leavened his smile. It was a serious statement of his knowledge of how great a place the big man had come to have in her life. She felt that he was really considering himself in the light of a substitute when he asked if she would care to go for a walk.

"Yes." She accepted at once.

"Plenty of time. I have to go out and do a few chores."

Having donned her wraps, she sat down in front of the fire to wait, and in a minute had fallen again into a fit of musing. It was not destined, however, to endure, for following the bang of a bunk-house door came the crunch of

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footsteps approaching the office. Intuitively she sensed that they were not Ferrier's, and when they paused outside, she rose and stood waiting, pale with apprehension. Her glance went to the stores, which stood uncovered as yet, just where they had been piled last evening. Her glance even roamed the shelves searching for a cover. Then the door opened and Bartholomew entered.

"Nelson in?" he asked, closing the door.

Since her return she had felt only a sense of safety, luxurious comfort in the home-coming. But now, while she returned the man's red stare from big, frightened eyes, she was seized again with the old fear. Like the prairie drift, it whirled about her, wrapped her in a cloud of evil; so vivid was the sensation that she gave a little gasp.

"He has gone away." In the intensity of her desire to be rid of him she let it out.

The next instant she read her mistake in the sudden gratification that flashed up in his face. "So that was his tracks leading out from the stable yesterday? Gone out for grub, eh?"

His considering look went from her to the stores, then returned and roved over her from head to heel. "Clerk went with him?"

She started. Then, remembering that he in common with the rest of the camp knew nothing of her absence, she nodded.

"The Boss?"

"He went out a minute ago—will be back shortly."

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"No one home but you, heigh?" His fulsome grin soaked the following words in evil: "Well, I shouldn't allow that you would be sorry."

"What do you mean?" she demanded, flushing, then regretted the next moment that she had afforded the opening.

For he instantly followed it up: "Oh, come, now; quit your kidding! You know well enough what I mean! Three's too many for steady driving."

"I—I don't understand."

Neither did she, for her girl's unsophistication was armored against all but the evil suggestion and reeking insolence of his tone and manner. Imagining that he wished to buy tobacco, she set herself to get rid of him. "Is there anything I can do for you?"

Of all possible things it was the worst she could have said. Interpreting it by his own evil psychology, he followed it up at once.

More by his grin, the greasy familiarity of his manner, than from the words, she caught at last a glimpse of his meaning. The mingled horror and shame of it held her speechless till he suddenly thrust out both hands. "Come here! I want to talk to you."

Turning swiftly, then, she ran into her little room and shot the wooden bolt. But that did not end it. While, hands clutched under her chin, elbows over her breast, she shrank in the

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far corner, his voice came over the partition. The door shook under his hand.

A dark cloud hovered on the edge of consciousness, but she fought it back, crying in her mind that she must not faint. "Oh, what shall I do? What *shall* I do?" While it rang in her thought help came in the form of Tom, the cookee, sent by his master to bring back her breakfast dishes.

Hearing the footsteps outside, the man spoke once more in low, threatening tones: "I'm going now, but I'll see you again, an' don't be trying to throw any more of that innocent stuff in my face. It don't go—see?"

Followed the shuffle of his moccasins across the floor, came the creak of the door as he passed out; then, to her intense relief, she heard the voice of the cookee asking if she had finished breakfast.

"Mr. Ferrier, miss?" He repeated her nervous question. "He's in the cook-house. Sure, I'll tell him to come at once."

If he had appeared just then she would undoubtedly have told all in a burst of distress. But, believing that she merely wished him to know that she was ready for their walk, Ferrier waited to finish his talk with the cook. Short as was the delay—not over five minutes—it still sufficed for her to think of consequences.

"If I tell him," she argued with herself, "he will go after that man, perhaps start a new riot,

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and Mr. Nelson won't be here to help. Besides, I just *couldn't!*" So she had her excuse ready when he arrived:

"Yes, I sent for you. A man came in just now, I suppose for tobacco. He looked so hard at the stores that I got nervous. Oughtn't they to be covered?"

He nodded. "It was carelessness. I ought to have thought of it. Who was it?"

"That red-eyed teamster. You remember, he was with you that day you found me on the trail."

"Humph! That's bad. He's the worst of them all. Well, it can't be helped. Anyway, I don't suppose that it makes any difference. We moved them over here just to make certain. Are you ready for your walk?"

As a matter of fact, the heart was taken out of her. She would have preferred to stay in. But, afraid that he might go out again and leave her alone, she followed him into the woods. Traveling by the same path she had used the other day with Templeton, it led them on to similar experiences. The bright sun had drawn many of the men out to the forest, and approaching the first knot of strollers, Gabrielle shrank close in against Ferrier's side. Now, however, in place of the rude stares and coarse laughter they had returned to Templeton's greetings they gave respectful, if sullen, nods in passing. With a sensitiveness to her feeling that she noted



"OF COURSE, IT ISN'T MUCH. ONLY A BEGINNING, BUT THEN—I DID IT MYSELF"





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at once and greatly appreciated Ferrier stepped behind her, interposing his strong, square shoulders between her and possible backward glances.

He did it at each meeting, and, as invariably happened when they were out together, her anxiety presently subsided, and she experienced again the old sense of security and comfort. But this time she did not rebel against it. When, having passed the last strollers, it would have been quite easy for her to have drawn away, she remained close to his side even after they sat down on a log to rest and overlook the camp from a small elevation.

Seen from that distance, nearly a mile over the tops of the trees, the buildings were exceedingly picturesque. Rising out of brilliant, sunlit snows, their brown masses conveyed an impression of solidity, comfort, warmth. Like a banner of good cheer, a white pennon of smoke fluttered above the cook-house.

"It looks good to me."

Glancing up when Ferrier spoke, she saw that his face was bright with a glow of pride that had in it a touch of the maternal. "Of course, it isn't much." He answered her glance just as though she had spoken. "Only a beginning, but then—I did it myself."

After a long pause he went to correct an idea which she had gained at home in Montreal. "Most people imagine that the old dad staked me to this, but it isn't true; there isn't a dollar

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of his in it. Not that he wasn't willing. He wanted to, but I'd made up my mind to do it myself. When I went to the Winnipeg bankers with my scheme I never even mentioned his name. In fact, the deal was closed, the financial arrangements all made, before the relationship leaked out."

"It is fine, too, to have done it." She spoke with real enthusiasm. "When I got my first glimpse of the river the other day, jammed with logs for miles, I began to see what a big thing it is. You deserve all kinds of credit."

"You think so?" He turned his face, bright-eyed, eager, shining. "That's mighty encouraging."

"And what a satisfaction to know that you did it all yourself! To build, create, see the things you have made in your mind take form under your eyes—there can be nothing finer in all the world."

"And nothing more natural. All boys have it, the desire to build, make something somewhere. That's what sets them to digging caves, whittling boats." A whimsical gleam slipped into his eyes. "And it isn't confined to the eternally masculine, either. Look at your small girls' experiments in doll housekeeping. The trouble is that civilization either smothers the instinct in most of us or gives it a wrong trend."

He spoke with quiet fervor that moved and touched her. Glancing up in his bright face, she

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was about to speak, but stopped at the crunching of feet in the snow around a bend of the trail. It was the same knot of men they had passed first, and after they had gone by Ferrier commented, laughing, upon his own ambition: "As I said, this is only the beginning—if things go right. But coming down to cases, my future largely depends at present upon those gentlemen. If Dominique arrives within a few days, and they all go back to work, it will be time enough to go on prophesying. But you are cold. Let's move on."

They had no more than passed from sight before another knot of men—among whom were Teetzel and two others of the deputation that had visited the office—came strolling along from the same direction and stopped to rest at the log.

"Gosh, but that's pretty!"

The man who spoke nodded toward the camp. But if the others had ever possessed the germs of an imagination such as that which prompted the remark they had been effectually seared by hunger, the fierce, gnawing hunger that assails even a well-fed man in the frozen air of the North. Food was the one topic that could produce a mental reaction in them. Now it came cropping out.

"Pretty?" Teetzel sniffed. "Hell! you kain't eat it. Nothing in the hull world would look pretty to me now save a beefsteak."

"You betcher!" the others chorused, and were

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going on to voice the individual complaints when a cynical voice broke in from behind:

"You fellows come out here to browse?"

It was Bartholomew and the Frenchman, Legarde, who had come in from a "swamping" trail. Stopping in front of the row, the two looked down upon them.

Teetzel nodded. "I would, if this poplar bark wasn't hard frozen. I'm that hungry, if you want to know, I could eat wood shavings."

"I know some that ain't hungry." The teamster's glance scintillated with low cunning. "Sure I do."

In a second it was taken up. "You bet; two of 'em passed just now."

"Say, did you see her breakfast t'other day?"

"Um-yum! did I? Buttered toast, hot cakes, bacon, all—"

"Canned cream and sugar—"

"While we drink our black coffee straight."

Only one, the man who had commented upon the scenery, lodged a protest: "Oh, shore! She's a woman. You'd expect to allow her a shade the best."

"*Shade?*" Teetzel snorted. "An' us eating dry bread and beans boiled without fat? *Shade?*"

"An' d'you allow that the rest of the office ain't eating?" Bartholomew seized upon his moment. "If you do, all I have to say is that you're a darned sight greener nor me. They're

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feeding fat—the Boss, Nelson, Miles—on the savings from our grub.”

“If I was sure o’ that—” Teetzel was beginning, when a man brought his fist down on his own leg in a passion of ravenous hunger.

“Is that straight, Bartholomew?”

“Straight?” The man’s evil mouth drew up under his nose in a snarling grin. “What for, d’you allow, they moved all the grub over to the office?”

“To cook at zer plaisure, eh?” Legarde lent his support. “To cook wizout our knowledge, it ees, by damn!”

“What? Have they got all the grub in there?” Teetzel demanded. “Are you sure of it?”

“Sure as my eyes can make me.” After telling how he had come to see the stores he added: “They must ha’ moved ’em over by night.”

“An’ you allow they’re cooking on the quiet?”

“Say, Bill”—he turned his red, contemptuous glance on the speaker—“supposing you was in there with all that grub? Would you go hungry?”

“I would *not*.”

“No more will they.”

It was his climax. His mean eyes fastened on the faces seeking the effect, and found it in the composite expression of wolfish hunger, anger, hate. “Are we going to stand for this?” Teetzel brought his fist down on the log.

“We ain’t!” It came from all round in a chorus

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which reached Ferrier and Gabrielle, proceeding on their way. "You bet we ain't." With all kinds of heated variations it ran up and down the line.

"Come on, boys!" Teetzel jumped up.

"What are you going to do?" Bartholomew called after as the gang moved off.

"To get that grub—if the other fellows will join in."

"No doubt o' that." Bartholomew grinned. "But, look-a-here: Don't go too fast. Sence you've been waiting so long, it ain't a-going to kill you to put it off till night. Talk it around the bunk-houses all day, an' every last man 'll be fighting fit by then."

"You're right." Nodding, Teetzel strode off, his following trailing behind.

## CHAPTER XIX

**F**ROM the walk Gabrielle returned a different girl to camp. She had absorbed something of the quiet and peace of the forest. Observed in perspective down the silent, sunlit vistas, even her late unpleasant experience with the teamster dwindled in its proportions.

It had wrought other effects, too—that sunny peace, clarifying her thought, dispelling illusions, clearing her mental vision so that she was able to review and form correct judgments upon her own emotions. A sudden drooping of her head marked, for instance, her understanding of the fact that, with all its enormous strength, her attraction toward Templeton had been purely physical. While she recalled with shamed blushes its terrible pull, she realized that it was merely born of the long centuries that were shoving her on to a consummation her spirit could never have sanctioned. And she wondered with clear, cold wonder at its sudden death, for she knew that were they ever to be thrown together again he could arouse in her nothing but dislike.

Nor did her self-revelations end there. Cer-



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tain surreptitious glances at Ferrier were instigated by knowledge of how large a part jealousy and pique had played in their personal drama. A decided touch of approval in them told, moreover, that in the absence of said ugly feelings Templeton would never have drawn her second glance. The quiet happiness that shone in Ferrier's face, breathed in every gentle tone, produced a pleasant reaction in her. At times she felt herself kindling with the old feeling, the tremulous happiness of their courting-days. But always, like a dash of cold water, a slight twinge of jealousy would return to quench the flame. If not actually hostile, the feeling was strong enough to prevent her from taking down of her own accord the bars his caution had set up between them; for, profiting by Nelson's advice and bitter experience, he was moving very slowly.

Up to the moment they entered the office she was calmed and quieted. But the instant her eyes fell on the piled stores her fears came flocking like evil birds home to roost. "Can't I go, too?" she asked, when he said that he was going to the cook-house.

The first actual request she had ever made to him since she came to the camp, its force was quintupled by the trembling of her lips, the fear in her gray, dilated eyes. With great reluctance he shook his head. "It's almost dinner-time, and I'm going over to back up Miles."

"You think there will be trouble?"

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"No, I'm not exactly looking for it. It will be less likely, however, if I'm there on watch."

"It is silly, I know," she still argued, "but I'm—nervous to-day. When that man came in this morning—"

"He did not dare—"

"No, no!" Alarmed by the sudden setting of the square jaws, flash of his eyes, she hid the truth. "He only asked for you. But—I'm silly, of course."

"Not a bit. It's perfectly natural. Now, look here: I'll fix the door so that it cannot be opened from the outside." With two raps of a hammer he knocked out the peg that moved the wooden bolt back and forth in its slot. "There now, don't open for any one except myself or the cook."

Leaving her partly reassured, he went on over to the cook-house, where the Fates were already setting the stage for the climax of the drama. Taking up a position at the head of the tables, with his back to the stove, he could see every man in the room, and he noticed at once that Teetzel, Stetson, and two or three others of the old reliables were sitting at the same table with Bartholomew and his gang. But, though disquieting, the change afforded no actual cause for alarm. The meal, moreover, proceeded with unusual quiet. Washing down their scant portions of beans and dry bread with gulps of unsweetened coffee, the men rose and filed out with

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scarcely a grumble. In comparison with the last half-dozen meals it was almost a love-feast, and its effect was plainly to be seen on the face he carried back to Gabrielle.

"Oh, I'm *so* glad!" she exclaimed, at the good news, and readily acceded to his proposal for another walk after she had eaten her lunch.

They left the camp by another route, and so came under observation of Bartholomew and Legarde, who had just stepped out of a bunk-house. Unseen by them, the two stood watching with hot, avid stares that were more significant even than their words.

"By Gar!" Legarde exclaimed it as the girl's skirt fluttered out of sight among the trees. "Now ees the chance. Let us call Hans an' Ole. We shall jump heem out there in the woods."

"In broad daylight? No, sirc!" Bartholomew shook his head. "Why not? Simply cos we ain't taking no fool chances. There's Teetzel, Stetson, an' their gang. They're wound up, all right, fighting mad over the grub. But we ain't sure of 'em in anything else, an' don't want 'em, in any case. But to-night? It 'll be easy as eating. Forget it—till then."

Meanwhile Gabrielle and Ferrier proceeded on their walk, which almost duplicated in both scenic and emotional effects their experience of the morning. Such differences as existed were merely of intensity. When, for instance, she slipped on the ice and was saved from a fall only

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by his quick hand the bars between them rattled in their sockets. But his caution stood the strain. Restoring her balance with gentle respect, he walked on, albeit tingling in pulse and limb.

After a long circuit through the woods in the opposite direction they arrived eventually at the very log from which they had overlooked the camp, and while they sat there resting, the bars received a second jar, this time from her impulsive hand. Naturally they had drifted again into talk of his plans.

"In ten years," he concluded, "I ought to stand even with the old dad. But"—he added it with a touch of sadness—"there would be little satisfaction in that. It isn't the money or even the work; it's the woman that stands behind all that man wants. Behind all good work she is always there. I don't believe that anything good was ever done without her. Sometimes she isn't worthy of it. Again, she has never known it was done for her. Quite often the finished labor has lacked her crowning. But, worthy or unworthy, conscious or unconscious, she is always there."

He was looking out over the camp and so did not see the sympathy surge in the gray eyes, the tremulous hand that advanced almost to his arm, then fell back into her lap. But he did catch the rich cadence of her voice: "This was done for—a woman?"

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“For you.”

He swung around, but her drooped head now hid the soft lights in her eyes. Mischief spiced her next remark: “Ah, I see! You said she was often unworthy.”

“Not you.”

His absolute conviction caused the mischief to burn up in a flush of shame. “But I am! I am!” She pleaded it with the earnestness that most people would use in establishing character. “I am unworthy. You forget that I eloped with —*him*.”

“You came back.”

“Nevertheless—” she stopped. But the feeling behind the qualification remained to strengthen the bars. “It is too soon.” The bars were still standing on their return.

## CHAPTER XX

“IT’S a pipe now!” The hope Ferrier thus expressed in cheerful slang was inspired by the frozen constellations in the black ice of the firmament above the office doorway. “Sure shot!” he added, after a second glance outside. “The back of the winter is broken. All signs point to fair weather, and we can look for Dominique in a couple of days.”

To his eye the camp presented its usual aspect, dim squares of yellow glowing in the dark mass of the buildings within the tall circle of spruce, roofed over by frosty stars. From its farther end the cook-house emitted its customary “exhaust” of steam and white wood-smoke. Punctuated with an occasional laugh or rude oath, a mutter of talk escaped from the bunk-houses. In all was no hint of coming trouble; nothing to tell of the man whose eye was glued to a spy-hole in the frost of one dark bunk-house. Uttering a last cheerful, “It’s going to be plain sailing after to-morrow,” he stepped out and closed the door.

Though the cracked tones of the cook’s cowbell were still reverberating in the dark woods, the tables were already filled, and as he entered

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long rows of rough faces turned in parallel waves toward the door. Usually the hum and growl of talk and complaints drowned all other sounds. But to-night—and he noted it with surprise—the tap of the cook's spoon as he served out beans echoed through the room. Instinctively his glance went first to the table where Bartholomew always sat with Legarde, Big Ole, and Hans, the quarrelsome Swede. They were not there. Neither did his quick search reveal one of them at the other tables.

"I wonder—" he began, in thought. But the cookees, who had been shooting tin plates of beans along the tables as fast as the cook filled them, came just then to the end. Before the suspicion could take full form it was ousted from Ferrier's mind by the bedlam of noise, hisses, catcalls, curses that set the room a-tremble.

So suddenly it came, with such furious vehemence of passion, that Ferrier could only stand and stare. Fully a score of men had jumped upon the tables and stood holding out the inadequate mess of beans at arm's-length above the red, angry faces of their fellows. From all sides furious animal glares returned his surprised stare. Glancing at the cook, he saw that his mouth was open, speaking, but he could not hear. Shrugging, he composed himself to wait till the noise abated.

His composure, however, was far from real. Born and bred in the atmosphere of the camps, he knew the lengths to which the riot might go.

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There in the dark woods, hundreds of miles beyond civilization's pale, Time rolled back her scrolls to the old order when all life obeyed one law, the law that governs alike the man and the beast in their loves and wars. At the thought of Gabrielle alone in the office he shivered with fear. But he took care not to show it. After the first burst the din had resolved into rude rhythms, huge pulsations that rose and fell like the waves of the sea. Choosing his time, he threw a question into the trough.

"What's the matter, boys? Gone clean crazy?"

That he had timed it just right was proven by a sudden dwindling in the volume. But enough remained to keep the windows and doors rattling in their frames. Very soon shouts of, "Shut up! Let him speak!" began to rise through the ruck.

"I asked what was the matter?" He asked it again when at last silence fell.

"*What's wrong?*" Teetzel jumped up on a bench. "This! We ain't a-going to stand it any more!" He dashed his tin plate of beans to the floor.

"You won't have to—much longer. We have had two fine days already, and you can see for yourselves that the weather has set in for fair. Mr. Nelson will be back some time to-morrow with the grub from the huts, and Dominique is liable to land at any time."



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At another time he might have prevailed, but, fed fat with tales of secret feasting in the office, the men had passed beyond reason. "Then why are you starving us?" The question flew in from all sides.

"There's grub enough to last out at double rations!"

"You bet—in the office!"

"No empty bellies there!"

"Cooking of nights while we're asleep!"

It came in a series of pugnacious bellows that culminated in Teetzel's roar: "You bet! We know where it is, an' we're going to get it! Come on!"

"Stop! Stop!"

An extra table ran down one side, and, leaping upon it, he coursed swiftly along it and gained the door ahead of the rioters, who were tumbling over each other and the benches in their haste to get out. "Stop!" He shouted it again at the top of his voice. If you won't listen to reason, if you *will* eat it all up at one meal, why, *go* ahead! Only there's no necessity for violence. I'll give you the stores myself."

It is doubtful whether they even heard. Standing with his back against the door, he formed the apex of a wedge which, under the tremendous pressure from behind, suddenly split the door with a rending crash and sent him flying backward between the two halves. As, breathless, he leaped up he saw through the open door of the

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office figures surging wildly in struggle. From among them issued a scream.

Left to herself, Gabrielle had curled up in her favorite posture and place on the hearth. Dimpled chin in her hands, elbows propped on her knees, she mused while the firelight leaped and danced, splashing its warm stains over the log walls. Unconscious of dark figures slinking outside, unaware of the eye at the hole where Ferrier had knocked the peg out of the door-bolt, she brooded over Ferrier's parting words.

If they proved true, if the weather *did* hold fair and Dominique arrived, there would be nothing to prevent her from going out with him on his next trip. When one has desperately desired a thing its sudden granting is apt to produce a flash of joy. It has to be set down, however, that the thought invested her with an expression which was principally startled. The sudden dilation of the gray eyes, little gasp, belonged less to joy than to dismay.

"Gabrielle, can it be that you—do not want to go?"

It was a momentous question; and, dropping her face in her hands, she set herself to find the answer. There is no need to detail her reflections. Their scope embraced all her recent experience, and while reviewing it once more she learned many things.

"I see—now." Her soft whisper came bubbling up from the deep springs of woman's love,

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the eternal desire to be petted, cherished, held warm from the cold winds of the world. "I see now. I was lonely, disillusioned, disappointed. I just *had* to have love." With clearness almost objective she looked back and saw the springs of her feeling rise and overflow like a stream that has been dammed by a landslide. "*He*—just happened to be in the way."

There appeared again for examination also the charity born of her own weakness out on the trail. Once more she raised and scrutinized the lovely face and figure of the half-breed girl, and even for her she now found an excuse: "Perhaps she really loved him."

In flashing sequence it all passed through her thought from the beginning a year ago to the events of that afternoon, and tears moistened her eyes as she recalled his half-sad commentary on man's work: "Behind it stands always the woman, always the woman behind the work." And so powerfully did she feel a sympathetic impulse to comfort and cheer him that it brought a blush to her cheek.

"No, no!" she denied the impulse. "It is too soon. If you hadn't made such a fool of yourself—perhaps? You must go—but you don't want to. Oh, I know what I'll do!" Her eyes lit brilliantly. "I'll go on up and see Nell, at Winnepagoos. Then when the spring drive comes down I can see him again. What's that?"



HELD RIGID BY HER AWFUL FEAR, SHE COULD ONLY STAND, GAZING IN HORROR  
AT THE HALF-DOZEN MEN WHO FOLLOWED THE DOOR INTO THE ROOM



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While she sat up, listening intently to a shuffling of feet outside the door, her blush faded, carrying with it every particle of color. "Oh, I'm sure that I heard something!" Then, just as she caught the sound again, it was drowned in the pandemonium that broke loose at that moment in the cook-house. But she could still see the door quivering under the pressure of heavy shoulders. Scrambling up, she stood and stared as it came crashing in.

Her first impulse was to run into her bedroom. But, held rigid by her awful fear, she could only stand, gazing in horror at the half-dozen men who followed the door into the room. It was fortunate, too, that she did not move. Otherwise they would have been upon her like so many wolves instead of standing, as they did, egging one another on with encouraging grins. Than the contrast between her delicacy and their coarseness, there could have been nothing more startling, and undoubtedly they felt it—the more powerfully when she addressed them in quiet tones that hid her quaking fear:

"If you are looking for Mr. Ferrier, he is in the cook-house."

"No; we ain't looking for him," Bartholomew answered. His beaked nose wrinkled in his evil grin.

"What can I—" She broke off, panting, her hand pressing her breast to steady the wild heart. Her glance went here and there, pleading,

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entreating for help, did not find it in those brutal faces. "Oh, won't you *please* go out? I'm fright—"

"Aw, come off!" Bartholomew interrupted.

He advanced, speaking, holding out his hands. But just when another step would have given her to him she eluded his grasp with a movement swift as that of a doubling hare. Laughing, he followed. Then, as he reached to seize her, she struck at him wildly, desperately, with all the weight of her body, strength of her fear. Landing full in his face, the blow sent him staggering backward. But the moment's respite cost her dearly. For that single physical contact broke the spell that had so far held the others. The next second she was seized by a dozen hands.

"Clap your hand over her mouth, Ole!"

Obeying, the Swede strangled her cry.

"Now, up with her! Rush her into the bunk-house before the others get here!"

She felt herself fainting. Then through the black cloud that was rolling over her consciousness burst an oblong of gold, the stream of light through the broken cook-house door. Inspired with sudden hope, she freed her mouth with a sudden twist of her neck and screamed with all her might.

Of itself the cry would have availed little. But striking the doorway in a mass almost twice its width just then, her captors stuck, broke, then,

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as Bartholomew tripped on the threshold and went down with the mass on top of him, Gabrielle was projected over their heads into the snow. Carried feet foremost, she fell on them. Then after one blind stagger she rushed on, threading her way among the strikers who were streaming across from the cook-house, and so ran into Ferrier as he rose from under the trampling feet.

"My husband! Oh, my husband!"

The cry came out of her just as naturally as though they had lived together for a score of years. Just as naturally, just as unconsciously, the appeal fired in him the strength and furious passion of the fighting male.

"Run, dear! Into the cook-house with you! I'll follow!"

Shoving her on, he snatched the neck-yoke from the fresh-water sled that stood in front of the cook-house; and, looking back from the doorway a moment later, she saw him in the yellow band of lamplight, head held high, lips drawn back from his set teeth in a formidable grin, facing her pursuers. Counting from the time she fell on her feet, barely ten seconds had elapsed. Another ten covered the dénouement.

"Miles! Miles! Quick!"

While she was calling the neck-yoke rose in the lamplight and fell—once, twice, each time taking down a man. Then, turning from a swift glance at the cook, she saw that he was down. Over the spot where he had stood writhed a kick-



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ing, stamping muddle of men. Crazed by the sight, she was making to run back when she was seized and pulled in from behind.

"Out o' me way!"

She had tried to run again, but stopped, halted by the blue glint of two long Colts in the cook's hands. The next second one of them spoke sharply, and though the smoke prevented her from seeing Bartholomew clutch his arm, she heard his yell and the quick scurry of running feet.

"Aisy wid it!" Miles again blocked her way. "They're all there in the shadow. There's nothing they'd be likin' better than to have you go out. Sam an' Tom will bring him in."

Round and squat, yet formidable by reason of the indomitable bravery that proceeded out of him like an essence, he stood in the doorway menacing the shadows with the Colts, while the cookees brought Ferrier in and laid him on a bunk. Then his voice rang sharply out: "Fair warning! 'Twill be the foolish head that shows around here. If ye've the wisdom of the swine that yez are, 'tis straight to your straw that ye'll go."

Stepping inside then, he had the cookees nail a heavy table across the doorway, then turned his attention to the windows; not any too soon, for while Tom was nailing boards across the sash the glass suddenly shattered and flew in his face. "An' ye'd better be thanking yer stars

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that this is Canada," Miles issued rough consolation while Tom wiped the blood from a cut on his forehead. "If 'twas Wisconsin 'tis more than snowballs ye'd be called on to face."

The barricades completed, he joined Gabrielle, who was laving Ferrier's face with water in vain efforts to bring him to. With the exception of a bruise on one temple his face was unmarred, and Miles's first remark dealt with his luck: "Faix, an' he has no right to the nose av him afther such a heeling." But after he had opened the clothing and saw the body, trampled to a blue pulp, his face fell. "Sure, he's hurt, poor man! The ribs av him are all caved in."

During his twenty years' service in the camps there was hardly a hurt that could be gained in the brutal lumbermen's fights that he had not been called upon to cure. Now, while Gabrielle looked breathlessly on, he ran his hands over Ferrier's bruised sides, locating and lifting two broken ribs into place with almost a surgeon's skill. When, half an hour later, the patient still remained unconscious in spite of Gabrielle's anxious work, Miles touched the bruised brow.

"His heart bates all right, so it must be this. They've landed on him wid the neck-yoke while he was down."

"You bet we did, an' we'll get him next time! You, too, an that—"

The epithet, bawled through a crack in the window-boards, was drowned by the sharp bark

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of the Colt that Miles snatched from the table. But, though the bullet perforated the board within an inch of the crack, a derisive yell on the outside marked a miss. After looting the office the strikers had gone to cooking over the bunk-house stoves, and their shouts and yells over prospective feasting formed a sinister background for scurrilous threats that kept seeping in from the outside.

"They think that I am a bad woman?" After twenty minutes of it Gabrielle looked questioningly up at the cook.

"Ar-r-r-r-r!" He ground it from between his teeth. "What matters the thoughts av such bastes?"

"But tell me, if they had known that I was his wife—wouldn't it have been different?"

Her eyes demanded truthful answer. After a few uneasy shuffles he tried evasion. "What *are* ye talking about? Would it have left thim a bit less hungry?"

But she was not to be denied. "That is another question. Please answer."

Unwillingly, grudgingly, he conceded. "Mind ye, I'm not saying that it would, for there's no knowing the bastes. But it might."

"Then I'm responsible. If he dies—"

The agony that drenched her white face overcame the cook. He laid a comforting hand on her shoulder. "No, no, 'tis not so bad. He isn't the kind that dies av a bit av a crack like

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that. Then ye're taking too much blame to yerself. Thim divils is bad, rotten bad, an' you're not to be blamed. An' you couldn't have done anything else. If it wasn't him"—he gently touched Ferrier's brow—"an' he hadn't been purged be great sorrow, I'd back ye up against him yet." With that touch of poesy that inheres in Celtic blood he finished: "But purged he is, washed clane in the deep waters av tribulation. Ye'll go far to find a wholesomer man."

"I know it—now."

So far she had been sitting by his side on a bench that the cook had placed for her. Slipping one arm under his head, she now drew it in against her bosom and drooped, drooped in pity and contrition till her flying hair completely hid his face. With the tact of your natural gentleman Miles turned his back and frowned at the cookees, who were not so chary.

"If thim divils don't cut up too ugly," he thought, "it's all going to work out fine. One thing's sure, 'tisin't them to stay freezing out there while the others are feasting."

Nor did they. One by one they went in to join the feasters, and, though after feeding full on the looted stores they came back later and exploded a second storm of threats outside the door, the frost was not to be denied. Two hours later the last of them had turned in to sleep off his gorge.

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Long before that, Miles had sent the cookees to their bunks at the other side of the room. To mitigate the cold from the broken windows, he was keeping both of his stoves red-hot, and between fires he conducted a patrol of the barricades. Satisfied at last that the trouble was over for that night at least, he made down a couch for Gabrielle on two benches close to the stove.

"Now, missy"—he laid a kind hand on her shoulder—"I'll look afther him while you take a bit av a rest."

Instead of answering she uttered a little cry: "Oh, his eyes are opening!"

Shortly afterward the first faint quiverings of his eyelids strengthened, and evolved presently into a puzzled stare into Gabrielle's face. Then, as it passed on to Miles, memory returned. He replied to the good fellow's inquiry as to how he was feeling, with the faintest of grins. His mouth opened, too, as though for speech. But neither his sore sides nor exhausted powers permitted. He smiled again, this time up in Gabrielle's face.

## CHAPTER XXI

“**W**HAT next?”

The question presented itself to Miles when at dawn he roused from a short spell of sleep on a bench by the stove.

It is natural to suppose that it must also have been present in Gabrielle's mind; but, as a matter of fact, it was not. With that wonderful feminine capacity for complete absorption in present duty she first made her own toilet, then heated water and began to do the same for the sleeping man. So absorbed, indeed, was she in her task that she failed to see Miles's preparation to answer the question, when he began to clean and load his guns.

Neither did she hear him mutter, while he was preparing breakfast from the remains of last night's meal: “Without a bit to ate, 'tis for thim to worry. 'Tis a blessing, too, that they didn't bolt all this before they raided the sthores. We'll not be stharving ourselves in the nixt three days.”

Outside, the men *were* worrying. Rising, empty and hungry as ever after last night's gorge, their melancholy glances traveled over a

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camp which was stripped of the last ounce of food. As the morning wore along their hungry glances traveled more often across to the cook-house, which returned a blank and unsympathetic stare from its boarded windows. In the counsels that were presently inaugurated around the bunk-house stoves, hindsight, which is proverbially keener than foresight, began to make itself felt.

"The Boss was right!"

"A half-loaf is better than none!"

"You bet it is!"

These and similar assertions gained more and more support, until finally a decided line of cleavage appeared between the Bartholomew gang and those whose penitence grew with their hunger. As, moreover, your general public loves a vicarious sacrifice, Bartholomew and his fellows were tarred with a blacker odium in proportion as Ferrier's wisdom gained more light. Nor was their status improved when the news was spread around, by the one or two stragglers who had seen it, of the attack on Gabrielle. In fact, progressing, as aforesaid, in exact ratio with the general hunger, their unpopularity grew so pronounced that they presently found it good policy to sequester themselves in a bunk-house with their wounded leader.

"For it's them that should be getting the heel."

"They will, too, before the finish."

Coupled with a widening in the scope of the

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public prejudice, observations such as these caused Teetzel and other ringleaders to follow suit and go for a walk in the forest. Whereby they came to be first witnesses to the answer which the Fates had prepared for the cook's question.

It was heralded by a faint tinkling far off in the forest, which grew in volume until the deeper tones of sleigh-bells could be heard spacing the clashing syncopations of the ponies' "strings." Before they glimpsed the half-dozen sleds that came wriggling like a black worm through the trees Teetzel declared the case:

"It's Nelson and Dominique! They must ha' met at Forty-five Mile."

During the long minute they stood watching the teams approach their rude faces exhibited both apprehension and relief. One man put the former into words: "Some one's going to get hurt when Nelson hears about last night."

"Well, we acted like damn' fools!" Teetzel's answer showed a complete return to his usual steady sanity. "We've got it coming to us."

A great logging-sled stood in the foreground just where it had been abandoned with its load on the day of the strike. As the "tote" teams turned out to go by they appeared ridiculously small by comparison. But as they drew closer the appearance of sleds, teams, and men testified to the pains and strains of the trip. The rollers, bunkers, and draw-bars were jammed



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with caked snow. A heavy fur of frost covered the loads. Incessant friction had worn every scrap of paint off the runners. Sticking up through rusty hides, the bones of the horses testified to the bitter travail, ineffable weariness of the long, hard trail, and the men, too, were marked. Black frost scabs pitted the faces of the teamsters Dominique had hired in the Portage.

The scars, ragged hides, paintless sleds sent out a mute reproach which all of the strikers felt and which Teetzel voiced. "They've sure had one time of it. While we were loafing and grumbling those fellows were just killing themselves to get through with the grub. I owe myself one good swift kick."

"Hello, boys!" Nelson hailed them just then from the leading sled, which he was driving, while the regular teamster walked behind to warm his feet. Lumberman style, he drove standing on top of the load, and, immense always, he loomed in his furs like some huge grizzly against the pale sky. Oppressed as they were by a sense of guilt, the men hesitated when he added a question: "Everything all right at the camp?"

"No, 'tain't," Teetzel came out with frank confession. "We've been making sixteen kinds of fools of ourselves." While he was telling of the troubles the eyes behind the giant's scarf shrank to points of steel. But, though his great bulk seemed to heave and swell, he listened

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quietly to the end. "We didn't know what Bartholomew was up to, an' we're damn' sorry for ourselves."

"Ferrier much hurt?" Nelson asked it after a pause.

"Kain't tell." Teetzel shook a repentant head. "After he was drug into the cook-house Miles nailed up the door and windows. We hain't seen hair nor hide of one of 'em sence."

"Didn't kill Bartholomew, I reckon?"

"Nope. Shot through one arm."

"Devil's luck!" He searched the downcast faces with stern eyes. "I suppose you're waiting to be fired?"

"We've earned it," three of them answered in chorus. Teetzel continued alone: "But the work isn't nearly finished. It 'u'd take time to get in new crews."

"Want another chance?"

"You bet! Give us a bite to eat, an' we'll go right to it."

"And the other fellows? Are they with you?"

Teetzel looked up with a shamefaced grin. "They're that far beyond us we thought it wise to come out here in the bush. Looked like they'd lynch us for a while."

"Bartholomew and his gang?"

"All in their hut. We'll stand with you." It came from the others in chorus. "Sure we will—give 'em the heel, if you say it."

Nelson shook his head. "There's a better way.

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They'll be just plain fired without a cent for their work and have to walk out. As for you chaps, you don't deserve any better, but, as you say, the work's got to be done. And I'm willing to go a bit further: if you pitch in, finish the cut, and get it down to the dump before the spring thaws we won't dock you a cent for the lay-off. That suit you?"

*Suit them?* Their broad grins gave answer. Trudging on ahead, they gained a quarter of a mile on the teams going into camp, and had told the cook and spread the news over the camp before Nelson arrived.

"How's Ferrier?" he called to Miles, who had just torn the table away from his door.

"Sick an' sore, but doing foine."

"Good! I'll be over there in a minute."

Reining in, he leaped from the load and walked without pause across to the bunk-houses, the doors of which were crowded with men. To each knot he spoke a few words whose tenor was explained by the ensuing event. Falling in behind him, they followed to Bartholomew's hut and arranged themselves in a double line at each side of the doorway.

"Give more room." Nelson surveyed the line, and after they had edged out till each man had free play for strap or waist-belt, he smiled grimly and went inside.

Legarde, Bartholomew, Big Ole, and Hans, Svenson, the fool, all were there. Rising as he

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entered, they stood surly and savage, brute beasts at bay, waiting at the far end of the room. Streaming in through the doorway, a band of sunlight struck a glint of steel behind the French-Canadian's hand.

"Drop that knife, Legarde; you won't need it. Drop it, I say, before I take you and crack your back!"

Huge, formidable as he was, they would still have fought had he been alone, trusting to drag him down by sheer weight of numbers. But through the open doorway they could see the men, catch the whistle of belts and straps swung in practice.

"Now, *get!*"

"Say, doan't we gat no food or pay?"

It was Svenson, the fool. At the sight of his lugubrious visage the hard line of Nelson's mouth loosened. "Since you've asked it, Mr. Svenson, you don't. Your pay is docked for the lay-off, and if you *must* eat—you'll find grub at Fifteen Mile. But be careful. Dominique will be after you to-morrow, and it will pay you both to behave and keep well ahead of him. If he finds anything wrong at the houses, or you're at the Portage when he arrives, you'll be turned over to the sheriff. Now *get!*"

He moved toward them. But he was not called upon to use force. Had there been any other way out, Bartholomew's red, rat eyes would surely have discovered it. Cunning to the end, he had

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pulled on his cap and mittens while Nelson was talking. Grasping his wounded arm with the other hand, he shot out through the door and down the line. Gathering a full share of welts, he yet missed the unmerciful flagellation that descended upon the others, who tripped and piled on top of Svenson. Keeping straight on down the "tote" trail, he likewise escaped the pursuit that dogged them a full mile, marking every step with a bruise.

While he looked on at the rout Nelson's iron severity melted in a grin. "It's sure a fickle thing, public opinion." He commented upon the whistle and crack of belts out among the trees. "Who'd think that it would have been hard yesterday to pick the sheep from the goats?"

Still laughing, he was walking over to the cook-house when Gabrielle came running out to meet him. Above the blue shadows under her eyes danced certain lights that were more eloquently revealing than hours of explanation. "How is—your husband?"

The squeeze she gave his hand told that he had made no mistake. "Sore and stiff, and weak, and—obstinate." Her smile transformed the mulish adverb into a soft caress.

"They won't let me get up," Ferrier complained, in a husky whisper a moment later.

"With three broken ribs and the life trampled out of your poor body? I should think not!" Even more eloquent than the happy lights,

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more revealing than her tender care, was the loving tyranny of her manner and voice, the surest indication of a woman's love.

Satisfied, Nelson went out to start the unloading and take other measures to restore the normal. "For," he said, "to-morrow we'll all be back at work."

At dusk it was all done. The lanterns, flashing around the stables, lit up a rude content on passing faces. Snatches of song, cheerful whistlings broke on the night as the teamsters went about their work feeding and currying the teams; no easy task, for after their long rest the animals were ticklish as young girls. The thunder of their poundings carried into the cook-house a welcome sound in Ferrier's ears.

He had refused to be moved back to the office till the men had eaten their meal. Lying in the cook's bunk, he watched with huge satisfaction that worthy and his helpers juggle caldrons of soup and erect pyramids of beef and hot biscuit in preparation for the onslaught. With all the appetizing odors that floated out over the camp, it was hardly necessary to ring the cow-bell. One hundred pairs of eyes spied Tom, the cookee, the instant he appeared in the doorway. Streaming in from all sides, the men filled the tables before the bell had ceased. In place of the sullen, scowling defiance all exhibited a sheepish humility that would have admirably fitted a band of

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school-boys caught playing truant. Rude children of the forest, their simple psychologies were not for matter of that one bit more complex.

During the afternoon Miles had taken it upon himself to let out a piece of news that had spread like wildfire over the camp: "She's the Boss's wife. You see, they'd had a bit of a scrap, an' wasn't on speaking terms when she first kem in, but it's all fixed up now." And this was responsible for a certain shy respect, almost awe, which Gabrielle sensed in the glances that crossed the room to her as she sat by Ferrier's bunk. The evil brooding, hot license, that had caused her such keen distress, all were gone. Quite unconsciously, she returned little smiles to their glances.

While the meal was proceeding, Ferrier watched it with something of the satisfaction a farmer feels when, the evening chores all done, he lingers at the door to listen to the happy munching of the animals in the dark stable. "I never knew till now how much it hurt me to see them half starving," he said, when, comfortable and contented, the men filed out. "And tomorrow the woods will wake up, sing again with the ring of the saws and axes. It will all be in full swing, and—"

Since she drew his head in against her shoulder last night no word of explanation had passed between them. Nor was it necessary. Words hamper feeling. Now, just as plainly as if he

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had said it, her mind filled in the pause: "And here is the woman to stand behind me." And just as clearly did he catch the significance of her answering smile.

Its soft reassurance flashed again into motherly tyranny when he reasserted his intention of getting up. "No, you won't!"

"You bet you won't!" Nelson backed her up.

Nor did he. Wrapped in blankets, he was picked up by the giant and carried, protesting, across to the office. Entering, Nelson was about to set his burden down on the bunk Ferrier had occupied before, when Gabrielle—who had run on before—came to her bedroom door. "Bring him in here. It is much more comfortable."

Since he had built the partition with his own hands the foreman had never set foot inside the doorway. During the long evenings he had taken pleasure in making furniture for her—a wash-stand, dresser, arm-chair—out of boxes, poles, a tub, and the lamp she held up revealed how her woman's wit had transformed them with drapes of white cotton, blanketing, skins, into comfortable and dainty things. Upon the dresser her silver-backed brush and comb and other appointments caught the golden glint of the lamp. Accentuating the feminine atmosphere, her spare clothing depended from pegs above her slippers and shoes. And as, after lowering Ferrier upon the bed, Nelson went out he took it all in with one shy, embarrassed glance.



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Walking back to the fireplace, he stood looking down from his great height into the blaze, which warmed his kind face with its ruby light. During the minute that he so stood, deep shadows of thought, sorrowful and pleasant, grave and gay, came and went in his eyes, settling at last in a great, yearning hunger of loneliness.

A noise behind him aroused him, and, turning, he saw Gabrielle standing in her doorway. The leaping firelight showed him her happy face as in a little run she came to him across the floor. Between them one of those rare spiritual relationships had been forming which permit communications without words. As, rising on tip-toe, she placed both hands on his shoulders and offered her face he sensed her deep gratitude and friendship. Bending, he kissed her cheek.

The next second she was back in the doorway. For another space she stood smiling happily, then the door closed.

Moving over to his bunk, he picked up his bedding and went out, softly closing the outer door.

THE END





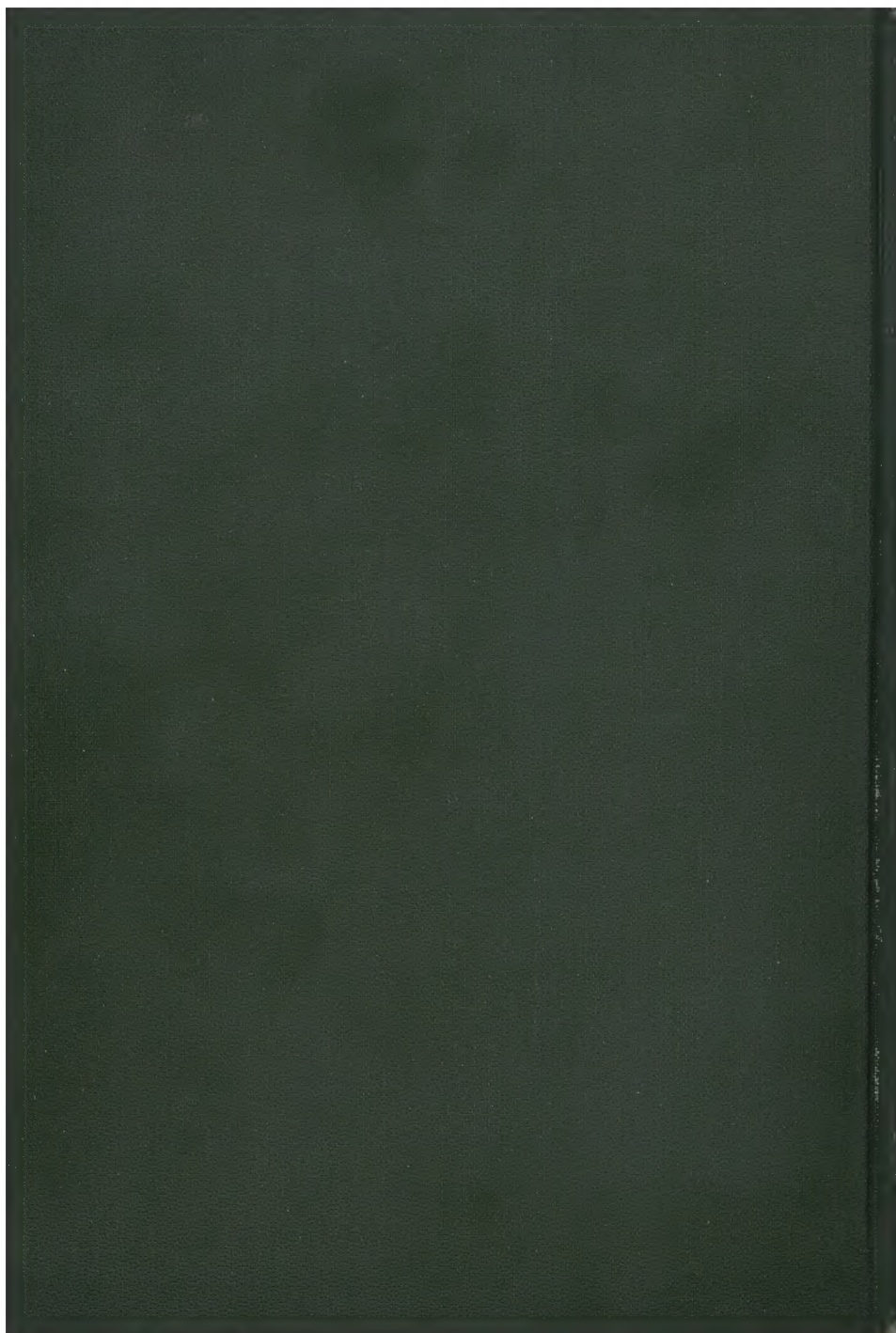


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